**Files from Ted Cook**

**THE YOUNGEST SIGNALMAN**

In September 1967 I applied for a Class 4 Signalman’s position at Amberley. This was a re-advertised vacancy, which meant that 17 or 18 year olds could apply. The first time it had been advertised no one wanted it! Mainly because it was a basic grade box and there was office work involved. I suppose being as no one else wanted the job and I was the only applicant was the reason I was given the job and became the youngest Signalman on BR. However as the shifts worked continued after 2200hrs by law I could not work that late until I was 18 years of age. So although I moved to Amberley in the September I did not however take over until the following April!

Amberley station is on the Mid Sussex line south of the North Downs and north of the South Downs. The station like so many stations is actually not in the place of its name! Amberley station is situated in the village of Houghton Bridge. At the time Amberley as now would be the larger of the two villages and draws most of its outgoing passengers from there.

Like most railway stations it is a fraction of its original size. However the goods yard which lead to Peppers Yard is now part of the Chalk Pits Museum. If you get the chance the Museum is well worth a visit. The first visit I made there I could not resist showing my young family how the “Block Instruments” that they have there worked.

“Don’t touch the exhibits sir” asked one of the staff.

“Sorry,” I said, “but I used to work these when they were in the box on the station!”

I do not think for a minute he believed me until I told him about my three years at the box and in the end we left the best of friends.

When I arrived at Amberley we still had the Camping Coaches in the yard. These were Pullman Coaches number 54 and 55. Unfortunately their condition proved their downfall. So in the summer of 1968 they were destroyed on the spot. The roofs being ripped off and the bodies set on fire leaving the bogies to be taken away on a low loader.

In their time the coaches had seen some unusual occupants. There were regular stories of train drivers reporting the coaches seen to be rocking violently at night!! To the family that arrived on a Saturday morning demanding a hot meal cooked for them! Others were fooled into pre ordering meat and vegetables from the local shop at higher prices than they later found they could pay in the supermarket in Littlehampton!!

The box did benefit from the closure of the coaches by acquiring quite a few items such as blankets which came in handy for the odd night shifts!!

**AMBERLEY SIGNAL BOX.**

The original signal box was located at the south end of the station before being moved into the station buildings under a cost saving exercise in the 1930’s. Today the box is open but not the Booking Office. It also has Standard BR Block Instruments.

When I was there we had the Tyres Two Position Instruments.

These showed when you had accepted a train by the little signal arm dropping and when the train was “On Line” the signal arm was put back to the horizontal position again. This was achieved by the use of the two bell plungers on the instrument with a “free” bell plunger for any other signals.

The trouble was “Train On Line” indication was the same as “Normal” no train signalled! This meant you had to be alert all the time to the state of the line. The additional problem at Amberley was the signals were all “Free” you could clear signals for the next train as soon as the first one had left the station if you so desired!

 Not that that ever happened! Which when you think of the distractions of the Amberley Signalman, Booking Office, Post Office, Phone Enquiries, etc. It was quite incredible it never happened!

The signal frame had 14 levers which when I took over 11 were working. On the up line, all signals were semaphore. There was a home signal approaching the station and a starting signal on the end of the platform. The up distant signal was located south of the short North Stoke Tunnel which brought the line through the South Downs. On the down line the signals were semaphore with a home signal unusually on the end of the platform past the box; this originally would have been on the approach to the signal box when the original box which was located at the south end of the station. The Down Starting Signal as today is located towards the tunnel entrance, and the up distant, a semaphore one, was on the approach to the station. This left two sets of points. A crossover and a connection into the yard with three ground signals making up the eleven working levers, the other three levers were now painted white and regarded as “spare.” They worked the points and signals in and out of the up siding which by now had been taken away.

**SIGNALLING SCHOOL**

Today’s new Signallers have two purpose built training schools at Leeds and Watford. In my last few years on the railway I was a Signaller Briefer and we would be at Leeds every thirteen weeks to pick up the new 13 week brief to be delivered to my signalling staff. I loved our two days at Leeds as we were often allowed to play on the wonderful new simulators that Network Rail now have available to train staff. The other thing was that we would usually be there on the same day as the intake of new Signallers and I am sorry to say I would wind them up on what to expect in the next few weeks at the school! None of it true of course!!

My time at signalling school was completely different. Every area on BR had its own way of training staff. The Southern even had its own Signalling Regulation Book!! This had different bell codes to the rest of the country, which was to cause me nightmares when I moved later in my railway career!

The signalling school I attended for my first three weeks was at Waterloo and run by an old Relief Signalman. He really put us all on the right path. Waterloo was not that easy to get to from Goring each day. It meant an early start and a late finish each day. The other thing was that arriving at London Bridge you made your way onto the footbridge and wait for indicator to show you which platform the next Waterloo service was going from, either 4 or 6. Most days the train was so full you could not get out at Waterloo and carried onto Charing Cross where I would sit down and ride back to Waterloo on the return working.

On one occasion I slipped up badly as the train did not return as a passenger service but went empty to the depot! Which meant I was late back to Waterloo that day and would you believe it no one believed my story why I was late!!!

The plan was after you had done three weeks at Waterloo you had eight weeks at your box before returning to Waterloo for one more week and your final exam. Unfortunately as I was so young it was decided to leave me at the box until I was 18 and then send me for my final exam. By now I had already been at Amberley for quite a few months as I had had time first to learn the office work.

 Worse than that when I finally did go back the signalling school had moved to its new home at Beckenham. This was a real pain of a place to get to each day. Glad to say I passed all the exams and returned to be approved by my local Area Inspector.

During the period of waiting my time at Amberley I did get a few little bits of overtime to help out with the wages. One of these was manning the automatic half barrier crossings when needed. The day I was shown how to work the barriers the Station Master took me to the barriers at Hardham south of Pulborough station. After going through the procedure he managed to fail the barriers and having just passed me out left me there to man them until the technicians turned up to put them right!!

Another occasion I got a Sunday afternoon shift at Christ’s Hospital Station. The trouble was as it got dark and I switched on the huge strip lights in the booking office and I went out onto the platform to do the same, imagine my surprise when I could not find any switches and looking up could see no lights. In a last desperate act I went to the box to see what to do! The Signalman told me there were no electric or even gas lights and in fact I would have to hang up oil lamps instead! Thank goodness the Signalman knew all about them and in fact put all the lamps out for me!

**THE STATION WITH A POST OFFICE**

**OR THE POST OFFICE WITH A STATION?!**

Amberley station was one of the few stations on BR to have a Sub Post Office included within the station buildings. Not only were the Booking Office and the Post Office in the one room but since the 1930’s the station signal box as well! This made for a unique situation and one that always reminded me of those great “Will Hay” movies!

As you approached the station buildings there was no outward sign of the mysteries within and strangers arriving at Amberley were fascinated by the signs and even more so on hearing the block bells ringing and the crashing of the signal levers! As you entered the Booking Hall, which was actually with the Booking Office one large room, the office and signal box being cut off only by a wooden partition. The only heating being a coal fire located in the Booking Office which meant that in the winter passengers were more likely to be waiting in the Booking Office by the fire than standing out in the cold hall! It made a mockery of the rule to keep signal boxes private!

 There again though was the thing where did the Booking Office finish and where did the Signal Box begin! Having said that the public would not really have been allowed in the Booking Office and certainly not in the Post Office part, wherever that bit was in this small area!!!

So as you entered the station firstly you might catch sight of the Post Office sign above the first window. This window was never used as all transactions were done over the stable entrance door which was usually open half way as this acted as the parcel counter for the station as well. Yes we dealt with parcel traffic as well. Mostly “Club” parcels from the mail order firms and there was a villager who delivered them for the railway at the costly sum of a shilling (5p) a parcel! The thing with this sort of traffic was it either going astray or not arriving at all at its destination, I will leave you to decide where it disappeared to en route! I know we did have a gentleman who ordered a lawn mower and it did not arrive so he rang the firm who dispatched another and that did not arrive so he ordered the same thing again. Eventually one afternoon the required lawn mower arrived. I rang the gentleman to tell him the good news. He was overjoyed as I think by now he was hacking his way out of his cottage each morning!

 However by the time he arrived at the station the lawn mower had gone to lawn mowers! Three to be precise! Eventually five turned up and as far as I know he never returned any so what happened to them all I shall never know!!!!

Continuing into the Booking Hall you came to the ticket window. This was the usual small window which had wooden doors on the inside which could be closed off to keep in the warmth and keep out eyes peering in! Unfortunately BR changed this for one of those large windows which meant as people walked through the poor Signalman could be seen in all his glory. We got round this be using a huge board which could be placed in front and cut off all contact with the booking hall. If however the window was open passengers could gaze in amazement at the signal box. The box itself is built as an extension onto the platform in the form of a large bay window and is still there today although sadly the Post Office and Booking Office are no longer in use. The station is entered and exited by the side gate.

In the late 1960’s when I was Signalman there the place could be summed up by an American Tourist staying with friends in the village who described it as “Quaint!” This same person would tell me how he tried not to stand out in the village. I told him that would be impossible as apart from the fact of having up to three cameras around his neck at any one time and also as soon as he said anything it was pretty obvious that he was not from around here! Plus the fact that when “I” had started working at Amberley I was told you had to be here thirty years to even say you were staying let alone be considered a “local!”He seemed to accept the fact that people would stare at him!

 Unfortunately anyone or anything out of the ordinary was of interest to the whole village and the main communicator of information was the Signalman at the station/post office! He was like an internet chat room of today. In other words he would he constantly “Twittering!” People would come in with gossip collect more and so it went on until the truth was probably lost about half a dozen callers back! Some of the stories got quite bazaar at times and I can admit now to making things up if it was a quiet day just to see how far it would go, all harmless tales of course usually about the railway and what I might have seen on the trains!!!

This same American Tourist who was staying in Amberley with his wife did not ever understand some of the English way of life. Remember this was the late 1960’s. He never got the hang of how the country shut down in the evening and on Sundays! As I said this is pre 24 hour shopping and clubbing! He once rang the station at one thirty in the morning to find out trains for later that day, or so he told me when he did get a reply at six thirty just after I had arrived for work! He could not understand why he did not get an answer to his call in the early hours surely there was someone there to answer train enquires!! At 0130 I said!!!! The best of all was unbeknown to me he had gone shopping in Littlehampton on a Wednesday afternoon! He came back absolutely amazed at being thrown out of a shop because it wanted to shut as it was “Early Closing Day!!!” There is another story of this couple a bit later on in the book.

**PASSING OUT AT AMBERLEY!**

When I say “Passing Out” I do not mean fainting. “Passing Out” in railway signalling terms means being passed to work a particular box. Each box has its own characteristics, in other words although there are standard rules each box has its own special instructions and each box its different layout and even though you may never make a particular move you have to know how to do should the need arise, which could be an emergency situation where you do not have time to think but react with the knowledge gained in training.

The thing with me at Amberley was that I had been there for over six months learning the office work as well as the signalling, due to the fact of waiting to obtain the age of 18 to be able in law to work after ten o’clock at night. Remember as well I had worked in Haywards Heath box for over a year and had seen most situations of a much larger working signal box than Amberley! So I was not expecting too long a session with the Area Inspector that day! How mistaken was I? After a morning working the box and showing the Area Inspector what I could do and answering a few rules I thought that would be it! I was amazed when he said he was getting the next train to Littlehampton and I was follow in an hour and we would go through some rules!! What had we been doing for the last four hours I thought!

An hour later saw me sitting opposite the Inspector in his office at Littlehampton station. We went through every rule in the book from Out Of Gauge Loads to Wrong Direction Moves, which in those days still involved paper tickets being issued for the move to be made! We ended up on Single Line Working and when we finally finished he asked if I had any questions. I replied just that when working at a small box like Amberley I would need any of these regulations! The Inspector replied that during my forthcoming signalling career I would meet each of these situations at least once! I can tell you now, how right he was! Something I used to pass on, when in my final years I was training or briefing signallers just starting out in the signal box!

The trouble was at 18 you think you know everything and nothing will ever happen to you that you cannot handle!! So the next day on my first day as a Signalman at Amberley I am on the “jungle telephone” with the other Signalmen on the line telling them all about my long day with the Inspector and how having worked Haywards Heath on my own he did not think I could work Amberley! A bit of a contradiction really as he had already given his approval for me to work the box the day before!

All of a sudden a voice came on the line. It was the Area Inspector I had not realised that the signal box phone circuit would of course include his office as well! He was asking if anybody wanted to talk to him?!! Surprisingly the phones in all the boxes and especially at Amberley were put down so no one heard his next words if there were any!!

The next day I hoped the incident from my first day had been put into the annuals of signal box history, some hope! As the twelve minutes past ten train departed towards Pulborough and London I saw this big gold branded hat coming over the footbridge towards the box! My heart sank but I decided not to say anything unless he did! All was going well the Inspector said he had just called to see how things were going and I made him a cup of coffee and got out the chocolate biscuits! I thought I had got away with it until as he started to leave and he turned round in the doorway and asked if I had been on the “Jungle Phone” the day before?

“Boss” I said, “when do I have time to go chatting on the phone during the day here? If it is not the box or the booking office work I am tied down with logging parcels or selling stamps!” I do not think for a minute he believed me but as there were no phone tapes in those days he knew he could not prove it and he had had three of my chocolate biscuits! So no more was said and soon after he was promoted further up the ladder and our paths never crossed again!!!

**SIGNAL LAMPING**

The signals at Amberley during this period were all lit by paraffin lamps which hopefully, but not always lasted for a week between changing. Having the wick turned up too high or too low could cause the lamp to go out or soot up. Bad weather especially strong winds could blow out the light, so you always hoped that while on duty the lights would keep in.

To change the lamps we got an hour per day overtime. The lamps should have been done in the hour after early shift. However to save staying on for that hour there were times when you could do them within your normal day when it was quiet, usually on a Sunday. Lamping was never fun. In the hot summer days you would be sweating your b\*\*\*\* off and in the winter in the cold frost or snow you could come down the ladder faster than you went up, unintentionally of course! You just stepped onto the first rung of the ladder and slipped off sliding down by holding onto the side of the ladder as you descended at an ever increasing speed until your feet connected with the ballast at the bottom!

 If that was not enough if the wind was blowing as well you would be lucky to change the lamp before the flame blew out or you were blown off the top of the ladder! Then there was the smell of paraffin, it took days to clear from your skin. When you took your girl friend out that night and went to get that all important good-night kiss all of a sudden she would push you away saying. “What’s that bloody smell?!”It then took a lot of explaining that paraffin was the new fragrance from Brute!!!

It was not all bad however as sometimes you might strike lucky and get a lift down to the Distant Signal in the local Police Van with its blue lights flashing we would race down the Farmer Brown’s yard trying to hit a chicken or two for tea! We never managed it I think they were better than the average chickens! Or if not so lucky it would be on the back of the farm cart at least that used to hide the smell of the paraffin that evening however I do think Brute ever made a “Dung” aftershave!!!

**LOCAL POLICE FORCE**

As Amberley was not the height of crime in the south of England, a lot of time was spent furthering relationships between the Railway and the Police. In other words supping tea at the station, and I do not mean the police station!! It did have its pitfalls. One day the Police Inspector wanted to meet up with our local PC and requested his location. Not wanting to say Amberley again he chose a village a few miles away. Unfortunately the Inspector was very close to this village and said he would meet up with our local constable there in five minutes!!

Even with the blue lights flashing it took nearly a quarter of an hour to reach the Inspector! Who commented on our PC’s arrival that he was not where he said he was!!!

I must admit though that the lifts to do the lamping and also to the local police house to view the 1970 World Cup matches while working nights at the station were always very welcome. The Ganger in charge of the work that night having the Police Station phone number in case I needed to get back in a hurry!!

Another night when I was not off to see the football live from Mexico the Handsignalman and I were settled down in the box. The lines being closed for the engineering work to be done. It was a terrible night the rain was lashing down outside, but we were tucked up warm around the coal fire. Not together I hasten to add!!

 Suddenly my college shakes me and says he can hear voices outside the station door. So with poker in one hand and hand lamp in the other we creep out throwing open the outside door. Two very wet fishermen who had been brewing up some soup on a little stove in the station doorway fell back into the booking hall!!!! I am not sure who was more surprised!! As there were no lights on they must have thought the station was deserted!! We just left them to it! As I settled down again it suddenly occurred to me, what did they think we were doing there in the dark?? However nothing else was said so I assumed they thought, as it was, that we were there legitimately.

Another night the lights on my motor bike failed and as it was summer I decided to get my head down until it was light and then ride home. I did not need lights to get home as I knew the roads like the back of my hand, but I was a bit worried about other road users knowing I was coming in the dark!! Unfortunately my dear old Mum had stopped up to watch late night TV and was worried when I did not come home! So she rang the station but I had taken the phone off the hook to save her ringing and waking me up!! This backfired as the operator on testing the line for her, told her the phone was off the hook, and suggested he get the local police to check! So at one in the morning the local PC was called out to find me curled up on the counter and not laying in a pool of blood!!!!!! He was not pleased to have been dragged out of his bed to find me tucked up in mine!!!!

**THE AMERICAN TOURIST**

Before I tell you this story I would like to say if there are any comebacks I shall deny any knowledge of it ever happening!!! That is not to say it is not true but I will leave you to be the judge at the end of the story, and you will also see the reason why I say I shall deny it ever happened if there are any repercussions later!!

I have mentioned this American couple already in the book, so the fact that they visited Amberley in the warm summer of 1969 is not in doubt. They travelled around our wonderful land by train and really enjoyed themselves. I only wished they had took a bit longer to view the sights. An example of how quick they travelled, on one particular day they “did” Edinburgh, York and Durham in one day!!

However they were a lovely friendly couple and made me laugh by the way the gentleman tried not to look out of place with his three cameras around his neck and the big Texan Hat on his head.

This couple told me about their friends in Texas called Mr and Mrs Amberley and they would never believe that there was a railway station named after them. I did not have the heart to explain that that probably was not quite the case!! However they took endless photos of the station and the signal box. Eventually the gentleman came up with a strange request. He wanted to take home to Texas one of our Southern green station signs with Amberley on it!!

You have to remember this is pre metal detector gates at airports, although I was a bit concerned how he was going to get it on the plane that was even if he could have one!!

Of course it was really out of the question I told him we could not go taking down station signs and giving them to passengers as we soon would not have any left and how would people know when they had arrived at Amberley. It would be back to war-time again when the station signs were removed to fool any Germans where they were!!!

However when he flashed some of those “quaint” English bank notes at me I decided I would see what I could do!!!

So the next evening after dark saw me up a ladder against one of the station lamp posts giving the station sign a clean with Brasso metal polish. I must have rubbed too hard because unfortunately the sign fell to the ground and as the bracket was broken there was no way it was going to fix back up! The only place was to dump the sign before someone might decide to throw it on the line!

Then I had the idea of furthering Anglo-American relations by letting our American couple have the sign to take home! So I gave it a bit more of a shine and wrapped it in newspaper. To say our couple were impressed would be an understatement! I was a bit worried about getting it through customs, but they assured me it would be ok. He did offer me some of those “quaint” notes, which I thought would be rude to refuse and I thought they could be took in payment for the extra work I had put in to give the sign an shine!!

A few weeks later I had a thank you letter from Texas with a photo of a certain porch in Texas with a green Southern station sign hanging from the roof. Unfortunately over the years the photo has got lost, but if ever you get the chance to visit the USA and pass a homestead in Texas called Amberley you might recall where the name came from!!!!

There is a footnote to this story in the fact that a month after the couple had returned home, the Station Master from Pulborough was making his usual daily visit. As usual he arrived by train. This particular day he alighted right opposite the lamp post without the station sign attached.

As he came in the office/box he commented,

“You seem to have lost a sign on one of your posts Ted”

Looking amazed I asked him where.

 So we find ourselves outside on the platform looking at the bare post!

“Well Governor” I said. “What do you expect; the station is not staffed at night and not always on Sundays and the kids these days will vandalise and pinch anything!!!”

It did a bit of good. From that time we staffed the station on both shifts on a Sunday. This proved to be a good move as we did not lose another green sign until they were changed them all to the black and white BR signs that is!!!!

Today the signs have changed again into the “new” Southern Railway format.

**DID THE RUSSIANS LAND AT AMBERLEY STATION?**

I was on a 12 hour night shift at Amberley one warm summer’s night in 1969. It was the height of the cold war between Russia and the West. I am telling this to try and justify my actions on this particular night and how I could have saved the West single handed against the invading might of the Soviet Army!!!

So bearing this in mind, on with the story.

Which I assure you is true!!!!

The reason I was working 12 hour night shift when the station and the box normally closed after the last train, was that there was work to be done on one of the river bridges, and the box needed to be open to “block the line” and make sure no trains went through while the work was taking place.

So once the last train had cleared the junction, the lines were blocked and work began I settled down on a couple of chairs with a blanket from the camping coaches over me!!

All of a sudden there was the sound of boots marching down the platform outside. I thought firstly it was the workman coming in for some tools or something. Then I realised there were too many of them and the sound of the boots were too much in rhythm.

The noise got louder and louder! I raised myself up to look out onto the platform and drew back in shock!!!! There marching down the platform were rows of men in combat uniform!!

I rushed to the rear window to check the car park for a possible exit. The sight that met my eyes in the moonlit yard was frightening!!!! There in this usually quiet railway yard were a variety of army vehicles of all sizes plus even more rows and rows of uniform men lined up and standing to attention!!!

I could hear shouting but could not understand what was being said. Russians I thought that was why I could not make out what was being shouted! Amberley I thought what a clever move, no one would expect an invasion to start from here!!!!

You should remember I had just come too from my slumbers and in that state you do tend not to be quite with it to start with!! I am saying that in my defence of later finding out the truth!!!!

Anyway I thought this my country, my village, well not quite but at least my second home and I was not going to let some Russian walk in without a fight!!!!

Bravely with a poker in one hand and a hand lamp in the other I put on the outside lights. The idea of this was to dazzle the enemy! I know! I know! It seemed like a good idea at the time!!!

So out I go shouting, although it did occur to me that if they were Russians they would not understand a word of it!!

Imagine my surprise then when the General or whatever he was turned quickly round and shouted back in perfect English with a touch of a Sussex accent!!

“Where the f...... hell did you come from?!”

For a second I was thrown completely by his response. Then recovering I said.

“I was just going to ask you the same thing!!”

“And what the f... are you doing in my yard?!!”

Before he had a chance to answer my question I answered his. I was getting braver by the minute!!

“I am the Signalman here and this is British Rail property so I say again, what the f... are you doing here?!!”

The General straightened up and replied.

“I am Commander ........ Of the..... Territorial Army and we are on exercise ‘White Horse’ which is starting from here and going over the South Downs to the coast”

“Territorial Army” I said, “Is that English?”

“British!” said the Commander, “and on top of that we have permission from your HQ to use this yard tonight. They assured us this station was unoccupied also if you care to look down the road you will see the local police are in attendance to control any traffic problems. The local villagers have been informed of tonight’s activities it looks like your bosses have failed to inform you!!!”

A bit relieved that I did not have to face the full force of the Russian Army on my own and feeling a bit silly at even thinking it I just said.

“Carry on Commander!” I turned on my heels and as best I could I marched back into the safety of the signal box!!!! Within the next hour the might of the Russian, sorry Territorial Army had moved out never to be seen at Amberley again!!!

**RULE BOOK**

When I started at Arundel Station in 1965 I was presented with my first British Railways Rule Book. This was a little black book dated 1955 revised 1961. The rules in this Rule Book were numbered from Rule 1 onwards with most divided into a number of clauses. You may remember I had already mentioned Rule 71a before when I was a Box Boy!

When I became Signalman at Amberley in 1968 I also had a copy of the green Signalling Regulation Book. While working at Amberley there was a Relief Signalman who had a wonderful knowledge of the Rule Book, not only knowing all the rules, but also their numbers in the book. This unfortunately, for others, he used to his advantage. What I mean is it was usually unfortunate for those on the other end of the conversation with this Signalman.

To show you an example of this, I was at Amberley one day when this particular person went out to advise a Driver that the signal wire had snapped and he could not clear the signal. This meant the driver would have to pass the signal at danger. He did not actually tell the driver this, all he said was.

“Driver, I want you to comply with Rule 40a!”

With that he showed the driver a green hand signal and returned to the signal box, leaving the bemused Driver to get his copy of the Rule Book and find out what the Signalman was describing.

In 1972 BR issued a new Rule Book which was the start of today’s format. This one was divided into sections for different procedures. In 1996 there was a real disaster of the introduction of individual Rule Books for each grade or set of grades. These all formed into a Master Rule Book which covered all grades and all books. Each individual book had its own set of rules for that grade. This sounds like a good idea until you realise that all these individual books were different sizes. The Signalmen’s book being the largest after the Master. The other thing was that none of the rule numbers were the same in any of the books. So quoting rule numbers from one book to another staff member of another grade just did not work!!!!

Not quite to do with rules, but with grades. Amberley box was graded the lowest grade box, Class 4, while all the other boxes on the line were class 3. Despite the fact we did so many other jobs this was not took into account while working out signal box grades. So we put in for up grading in 1969 sighting the fact that we got the same number of trains and all the other jobs we were expected to do. The Railway agreed after months of meetings. We thought we had won a battle, which I suppose we had, but the Railway won the war! Two weeks after we were awarded our grade, the yearly pay round saw all grade 4 boxes were up-graded to class 3!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**FLOODS AT AMBERLEY 1969**

**AMBERLEY BECOMES A TERMINAL STATION!**

The River Arun runs through the Mid Sussex Area and the Mid Sussex Railway Line crosses the river many times on its route south towards the coast.

The River Arun is a tidal river and one of the fastest rivers in England at normal times. It ends or if you like starts its journey at Littlehampton where it joins the English Channel.

Since 1969 a lot of work has been done to strengthen the banks of the river to stop it flooding.

The year of 1969 was a particularly wet one, resulting in a very bad spell one weekend. So much so that the River Arun burst its banks in many places and also flooded the railway line at more than one point.

So by the Monday the line was closed north of Amberley.

Amberley station thus became a terminal station for a day! There was a shuttle train service between Bognor Regis and Amberley.

A bus service was laid on between Amberley, Pulborough and Billingshurst, from where the train service to London resumed.

The next day the line between Amberley and Pulborough was re-opened but the line between Pulborough and Billingshurst remained closed for the rest of the week. During this time the train shuttle went as far as Pulborough and the bus service operated between there and Billingshurst.

One other fact of this day of trains terminating at Amberley was the Southdown bus company who provided the replacement buses. What they did not realise was that although the buses would not follow the whole of the usual route 71 service, which was booked a single deck vehicle this being a lightly used route, the main reason for it being a single deck route was the low bridge at Amberley Station and was too low for a double deck bus!

So to prevent any mishaps at the low bridge by any large vehicle including double deck buses diverted off their usual route by the flooded roads, the local Policeman was sent to keep an eye out in case any vehicles made it through the diversions and got lost and onto the wrong road. I forgot to mention that at the time the sign on the bridge was not quite correct unless you passed underneath the bridge in the middle of the road. This was due to the resurfacing of the road over the years and the sign never being amended! Locals knew this and any large local vehicle (i.e.) a tractor and trailer loaded with hay would know to pass under the bridge in the middle of the road. Any strangers would not know this trick and could be caught out!

So there we are myself and our local p.c. waiting for our one terminating train an hour and the replacement bus to arrive. As usual the local Policeman is having a well earned cup of tea in the box. I say well earned, his words, all he had done was to park the police car by the bridge so anyone approaching would slow down and if driving a high sided vehicle would realise they could not get under the bridge! That was the theory anyway!!!

So looking out from the signal box window over the flooded fields you could see the road making its way up the steep hill away from the station towards the main A29 trunk road. As I am looking out I spot the green and white of a double deck Southdown bus coming down the hill towards the station.

“You know you are supposed to be on the lookout for high sided vehicles?” I ask our local officer as he sips his delicious brew.

“Yes” he replies as he dips another of my biscuits in his tea.

“Well” I continue “there is this great big double deck bus hurtling towards us down the hill, if you look out of the window you can see it!”

“F---ing hell” came the reply as a certain PC disappeared at a rate of knots down the yard towards the bridge to stop the said bus before it became Southdown’s latest open topper!!!!

Needless to say he managed to stop the said vehicle before it traversed the bridge. It turned round and took its passengers off the shuttle train back from there. This meant a short walk for them from the station down the yard and under the station bridge to the bus. It was a good thing the rain had stopped by then!!!!!!!!!!!!

**YOU SHOULD NEVER GO BACK!!!!!!!!!!**

 “You should never go back!” Not really true in my case in regards to going back to Sussex. For the first few years after moving to Leicester we, the ever expanding family would come down to Worthing to visit my parents and friends. At one stage during this period we brought all five children with us! The oldest Sophie would have been 13 and the youngest Matthew as a baby in arms. How on earth did we do it?!! PLA was a great help. If you remember PLA it was “Passengers Luggage In Advance.”

My Father sadly passed away in 1984 before Matthew was born but we still visited my Mum until after a heart attack in 1993 at the age of 86, which she survived and we moved her to live near us in Leicester where she lived until the ripe old age of 95! To bring the family across London in those days was no easy matter. Until the opening of the Thameslink service much later it was either a taxi or underground trip. Even until the opening of the new St Pancras station it was a walk down the road past Kings Cross main line station to get to the Thameslink station.

How wonderful is it now to get from the East Midlands train to the First Capital Connect service. It is possible to be off one and on the other in ten minutes, why did they not have that all those years ago?!! Even today it is usually just I and my lovely wife Mary who make the trip, but we still visit the old haunts regularly.

So in this last part I have re-visited my places of work.

Arundel station basically still looks the same at first glance. The car park where I tried to charge the Duke of Norfolk for parking is still there. The station buildings are the same in fact the booking office is still manned but the waiting rooms I cleaned so well as Junior Porter do not have the wooden table that a certain person would run her finger over when she arrived to catch her train to see if it had been dusted!! I was always tempted but never dared to rub a layer of polish on it when I saw this lady approaching!!! Nowadays there are soft chairs and sofas in the waiting rooms!!! The bay platform track has been lifted and the land is overgrown with green vegetation. The Southern style signal box is still in place at the end of the platform, but there is no crashing of levers as a mini panel has replaced the signal lever frame.

This box now controls not only Arundel but the two boxes further south on the tri-angle towards Littlehampton, namely Arundel Junction and Ford signal boxes.

Going from Arundel I went to Haywards Heath as a Box Lad. Again the station still survives in the same format. The signal box has gone the area for miles around now controlled by the massive power box at Three Bridges. In fact there is bi-directional working through the station, (This means you can run trains in either direction through any of the four platforms) which would have helped with train failures and number 5 points in my days!! Across the road the Hayworth Hotel is modernised and now called Hayworth House. Sadly no longer a hotel today it is used as business premises.

From Haywards Heath I moved to my first signal box at Amberley. Today Amberley signal box still survives. In fact the three boxes of Billingshurst, Pulborough and Amberley are a semaphore signalled island surrounded by coloured light signalling. With Three Bridges box creeping ever nearer from the north and Arundel panel box to the south. There are two other semaphore boxes nearby at the termini of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis.

Looking to the future of these boxes it would seem that Bognor would go under the new panel box recently opened at Barnham where the branch from Bognor joins the main line. As for the rest a possible new panel box covering Littlehampton, Arundel, Amberley, Pulborough and Billinghurst could be a possibility?

As for Amberley box all the point work has now gone just leaving the three signals each way and even of those the distant signals are now colour light signals, so no need for fog working these days! The station house is long gone and the goods yard and Pepper’s yard have been taken over by the Chalk Pits Museum. The Booking Office and Post Office no longer exist and in fact for some 15 years the signal box was only staffed for diversions off the main Brighton to London line! However with Southern Trains increasing the service to minimum six trains an hour it required Amberley to be open two shifts a day for the last couple of years to break up the long section between Arundel and Pulborough. So it is lovely for me to return to Amberley and see the semaphore signals still in use and the block bells still ringing. The instruments these days are the standard BR type and there are a few electronic screens in the box but it still seems like home to me.

From Amberley I moved to my home town of Goring-by-sea. There is no sign today of my last box I worked on the Southern. The lovely wooden crossing gates have been replaced by lifting barriers. The whole operation controlled from Lancing station signal box some miles away. The new bridge takes most of the traffic away from the crossing and all that needs to use it is pedestrians or cars serving the station.

 As I stand on the footbridge however if I close my eyes I can still hear the bells ringing in the box, the sound of the gates crashing against the stops as they close across the roadway. The signal levers being pulled and the semaphore signal on the end of the platform coming off and Ferring’s motor distant which was underneath creeping to a clear signal, and yes and is that the sound of a West Country Steam Loco whistling as it approaches with the Brighton to Plymouth Express!!! Or is it all a dream!!!!!!!!!!!

Who says you should never go back?!!!!!!!

THE AMBERLEY GHOST STORY BY TED COOK

Mr. James Crabtree lived in a cottage in Pulborough, West Sussex. He was in his late sixties. He had never married and been retired for the last four years. His still had a full head of hair which had turned white over the last few years. He also sported a large white beard which made him look a formidable looking character and well known around the village.

Mrs. Crabtree the ninety year old mother of James Crabtree still lived in the family home in the village of Amberley a few miles to the south of her son’s home. She lived on her own and although frail she managed well for her great age. Mrs Crabtree had a lot of friends in the village that kept an eye on her and did various errands for her, except on Fridays. That was the day her son came to visit, and he took care of his Mother’s needs for that day each week.

As usual this Friday James Crabtree made his way from his home in Pulborough to his Mum’s cottage in Amberley. He always travelled by the same train each Friday.

This Friday was no exception. It was Friday 13th February 1959 and it was a cold winter’s day. The dark clouds looked like there could be snow on the way and the biting wind made anyone outside wrap their coat around themselves to try to keep the little warmth of their bodies inside.

The train which James Crabtree caught each Friday morning left Pulborough station at nine minutes past eight. With the cold weather that morning the train was slightly behind time. James waited on the open platform stamping his feet to try to keep the circulation going round his body. The wind was whistling under the station canopy making anyone standing on the platform wonder why they had even got out of bed that morning!

Some ten minutes after it was due to arrive there appeared out of the gloom a green coloured object approaching at speed. The few intending passengers moved forward towards the edge of the platform. The four car electric train screeched to a halt at the side of them. One door swung open and a couple of men in working clothes got out onto the platform, pulling their coats up around their necks as they left the warmth of the railway carriage and met the full force of the cold winter’s air in their faces. The last one of the two to get out slammed the carriage door shut.

James Crabtree along with the other passengers who had been awaiting the overdue train boarded further down the carriage. James closed the door behind them with a satisfying bang, pleased to be out of the cold and on his way at last. The Station Porter who had only appeared out of the staff room as the train had entered the station put his arm up in the air and blew on his whistle to give the “right away” signal to the Guard at the rear of the train. The Guard waved his green flag towards the Driver looking out of his cab at the front. The Driver gave a toot on the train whistle and quickly disappeared back inside his cab.

The Guard hopped into the brake van closing the door behind him and as the train pulled out of the station the Guard nodded to the Porter as he passed. The Porter nodded back and turned quickly to go back into the warmth of the staff room. In the carriage James Crabtree sat by the window looking out at the gloomy morning. “There will be snow before I get home tonight” he thought. Then thinking if it did get too heavy he supposed he could always bed down at his Mother’s cottage for the night. He would not be missed at his home living there all alone as he did.

It was times like this when he hoped that there would have been someone there waiting for him. To make his tea and warm his slippers by the fire but he had never married or even got near to it. Most of his life he had been with his Mother and then when eventually he had managed to buy a place of his own, he was past the time of finding himself a bride. So he had settled for the bachelor life and that was how it had been for these last few years. Now he had retired he spent his time walking on the Downs or fishing in the local river. Except on Fridays, like today the one day in the week when he would visit his Mother.

There were other days in the year Easter, Christmas when he would stay overnight and on her birthday but his Mother had always been independent and only accepted the minimum of help.

James was drawn back to reality as the train noise suddenly changed, as the electric service rattled over Timberley Viaduct. “Viaduct” indeed thought James it is only a small bridge over the River Arun. The line crosses the river many times on its journey south. The only difference with Timberley was it was a steel girder bridge, but with only one span and it did make a different sound when trains passed over it to all the other bridges on the line, but to call it a viaduct was to give it a statue not suited to its size.

Before he knew it the train was slowing for Amberley station and his destination. James eased himself off the seat and stood up by the carriage door. The train drew to a halt in the platform of Amberley station. James opened the door and the cold air hit him in the face. He shivered and pulled his coat up around his chin. Climbing out onto the platform he felt sorry to have to leave the warmth of the train carriage. Slowly he made his way to the exit. Walking through the booking hall he handed his ticket to the man at the counter without saying a word.

Out in the station yard he felt even colder as the wind blew up from the roadway below. As with every other Friday he made his way towards the village and his Mother’s house.

The walk took him down the station yard to the road and turning right out of the gate up the hill to the village of Amberley. There being a distinct lack of a pavement meant a walk on the right hand side of the road facing oncoming traffic. This could cause James to become frightened if any came at speed towards him.

Eventually he made it to the village, a distance of about a thousand metres but always seemed longer. James always wondered why the station was named after a village it was not that close to, and why it was not called Houghton Bridge as that was actually where the station was located! Then he thought there must be more places just like Amberley Station. James was still pondering this idea as he reached the village shop.

Each week James would get some groceries for his Mother and himself. As he was used to cooking for himself, James always cooked for his Mum on his weekly visit. He also took with him a couple of cream cakes as an after lunch treat. So armed with his groceries and cakes he set off for the last few yards to his Mother’s house.

When James arrived at his Mum’s house he entered with his own key. He called out a welcome but gets no reply. James took the groceries into the kitchen and left them on the table. Returning to the front room there is no sign of his Mother. He calls out but gets no reply. James goes to his Mother’s bedroom. Knocking on her door he still gets no reply.

 Pushing the door open slowly, he finds his aged Mum still in bed. She looks so peaceful, but lifeless. Mrs Crabtree had lived a long life but during the night the Angels had come to take her.

Over the next few hours James’s day sped by in the affairs that followed his Mother’s passing. So it was late that day that he found himself back at Amberley Station. It had been snowing during the evening and the fresh crisp layer of snow was undisturbed as James made his way up the station yard. He entered the booking hall and knocked the snow off his shoes. Going to the ticket window he asked if the seven minutes past eight train was running and if it was on time.

The electrified lines through Amberley were subject to contact problems between the conductor rails carrying the power and the train when snow or ice abound. Luckily this evening the train to Pulborough was on time. James bought a single ticket back to Pulborough. He always brought a single ticket each way in case he stayed over at his Mother’s place. This particular night there was no way he was going to stay in the now empty cottage. James was feeling distraught by the events of the day. He made his way across the footbridge to the opposite platform to await the arrival of the seven minutes past eight train.

The Signalman on duty that evening at Amberley, (although these station personal were issuing tickets their prim job was the signalling of the trains and that had to take priority over the booking office work should the need arise so they were graded as Signalmen). The Signalman had to send in the daily report to Pulborough as this was the main station for accounts etc. for Amberley.

As the train approached the Signalman left the office/signal box. Locking the door he made his way across to the far platform with the day’s accounts to go to Pulborough.

Although it was only eight o’clock in the evening it was very rare to do any more trade in the booking office and if in the event of a ticket being sold the monies would just go into the following day’s takings. Any passengers at the station after this time were only going one way from the train to their home!

The train appeared out of the tunnel its headlight shinning bright in the darkness. Snow covered the platform and the Signalman could see the footprints of James Crabtree in the snow. It looked like he had come down from the footbridge and walked towards the front end of the platform but there was no sign of him returning to the main part of the platform. In fact there was no sign of James Crabtree anywhere on the station.

Our Signalman knew of James’s mother’s death that day. In a small village like Amberley news travels fast, even in the days before the mobile phone or inter-net! The train pulled into the station and slid to a halt on the slippery rails. The Guard looked out of his window not wanting to stay too long in the cold air. The Signalman walked to the Guard and gave him the letter for Pulborough station. He also mentioned the fact that there should be a passenger to get on for Pulborough. The Guard thought nobody should be about on a night like this. The Signalman was a bit concerned however as to where James Crabtree had gone as he told the Guard about the footprints in the snow and the events of the day in James’s life.

The Guard suggested the Signalman to advise the Driver to keep a lookout in case the said person had decided to continue walking off the end of the platform and worse still be lying on or near the track.

The Signalman went and told the Driver the tale and showed him where the footprints ended at the end of the platform. The Driver was not happy about taking the train forward in the dark if there was someone wandering around on the line. In the end he persuaded the Guard to ride up front with him to give an extra pair of eyes.

So eventually after some delay the train moved slowly out of the station. The Signalman watched it slowly moving away and as he did he again looked at the footprints in the snow, they just seemed to go off the end of the platform. After that the snow lay crisp and even apart from the rails where the train had departed. Where had James Crabtree gone? The Signalman remembering his duties made his way back to the signal box / office to advise the Pulborough Signalman why the train was taking so long to get to him and to find out from the Driver if he had seen anything. The Signalman also rang the Control Office to advise them of the delay and circumstances of what had occurred.

The Controller did not seem too worried and suggested that the passenger had just changed his mind about travelling. The Signalman agreed but if that had been the case where were his returning footprints in the snow? It would have been impossible to retrace his own footprints!

Eventually the train arrived at Pulborough and reported seeing nothing on the journey between the two points. So where had the elusive James Crabtree gone? The Controller suggested, as had been the case in the past, if the worst had happened, he might be found when it got light in the morning.

However the next morning which dawned sunny and bright if cold no sign was found of James Crabtree. The Control Office as a matter of routine informed the Police of the previous evening’s events. The local policeman was sent to call on James Crabtree at his cottage in Pulborough. He found it empty as James Crabtree had left it the day before and there was no sign of anyone being there since. Over the next few weeks no one came near the cottage and eventually the local Police made an entry to prove that the place was and had been empty since that fateful day.

The disappearance of James Crabtree was a talking point in both villages and many farfetched excuses were put forward as to what had happened to him. After nearly two months the stories faded and James’s Mother’s funeral took place with a huge crowd attending. Most it was said came to see if James would suddenly turn up! Unfortunately the attendees were disappointed and there was no sign of James Crabtree. The stories about where James was were resurrected for a week or so and again slowly faded into history or legend.

Moving onto the same day Friday February 13th but it is now 1970. It is again a cold evening and it has been snowing in the area of Amberley. Like 16 years previous the snow lay thickly on the ground. The clock in the signal box come booking office at Amberley Railway Station showed eight o’clock. Suddenly the outside door to the booking hall opened letting a flood of cold air in, followed by an elderly man in his late 60’s.

The man came over to the booking office window and asked the Signalman whether the seven minutes past eight train to Pulborough was on time. The Signalman looked at the man and asked if he meant the 8.12 train?

The man looked puzzled but asked if the times had changed. The Signalman replied that yes the services going north had been at 12 minutes past the hour for some years now. The man nodded and said it had been a long time since he had travelled at that time of night.

So after buying his ticket, a single to Pulborough, he left the booking hall to make his way to the opposite platform. The snow lay evenly on the tarmac of the station platform. The Signalman watched the man head for the footbridge leaving his footprints in the snow.

The bells in the signal box announced the train was on its way. The Signalman pulled the levers in the box to clear the signals for the approaching train. For some reason he seemed drawn to go over to the other platform to see the train away. Normally the trains in that direction the Guard would see that passengers were on and off safely and all the doors were shut before giving the Driver the all clear to depart. So it was unusual for the Signalman to go over to that side of the station unless there was a reason to speak to the train crew. So why on this one occasion was he drawn to go over to see this particular train?

Later on he would be unable to say why he had gone over to see this particular train, apart from thinking perhaps he thought the platform might be dangerous and the elderly passenger might want help. However at the time he was not sure why he was so keen to go out from the warm of the station buildings into the cold night air.

 However go he did. When he reached the opposite platform there was no sign of the elderly passenger! The Signalman could see the footprints in the snow where the intending passenger had come over the footbridge but instead of going to the cover of the waiting room the footprints went to the end of the platform!

After that the snow laid unbroken either side of the rails, and there were no sign of the footprints returning. The Signalman stood looking at the footprints in amazement!

There seemed no logical explanation for what he was looking at. He was brought back to reality with the arrival of the train in the platform. The Guard opened his door. The Signalman walked up to him.

“What’s up?” asked the Guard. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost!”

“I think I might have!” replied the Signalman.

“Yeh, that’s about all you will see around here this time of night!” laughed the Guard.

“No” replied the confused Signalman. He told the Guard about the vanishing passenger.

It was now the Guard whose face drained of colour! By a strange coincidence 11 years ago to the day this Guard was on the same train although this day it was timed a few minutes later. It was he and the Driver on that fateful day that looked out in vain for James Crabtree!

The Guard told about the fateful trip 11 years before and he recalled it was the same date Friday 13th February. Both the men shuddered as they thought about what had happened all those years before and this evening.

The Guard asked the Signalman what he wanted to do about the missing passenger. The Rule Book did not cover disappearing passengers especially 11 years apart! So the Guard suggested they keep an eye out en route to Pulborough as he had done years before! This they did and as 11 years before, but there was no sign of the intending passenger.

The next day the local policeman hearing the tale of the night before brought in a photo from 11 years ago of missing person James Crabtree. The Signalman looked at the photo in absolute shock staring back at him was the face of the passenger that never boarded the train the night before!!!!

Could this have been James Crabtree trying to get to Pulborough on the same train as 11 years ago? Even if this was so he would have been 11 years older and this person had looked the same as 11 years previous! The original thoughts years ago were that James had either disappeared to pastures new or even fallen in the river and been swept away in the dark of the night! So could this have been the Ghost of James Crabtree still trying to get home??? It had been Friday 13th February and it had been snowing just as 11 years before!!!!!

Since then February 13th has fallen on a Friday some severn times but no sign has been seen of an intending passenger for the London train after eight in the evening. Could it be that the conditions have not been the same? In other words there was not any snow on the ground or the fact that at many times during that period the station at Amberley has not been staffed at that time? However the next time February 13th falls on a Friday is the year 2026. What would it be to be at Amberley station at eight o’clock that evening especially if it there was snow on the ground!!!!! Might you join me there in 2026?

One final point I should tell you.

 I was that Signalman on duty at Amberley in 1970!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!