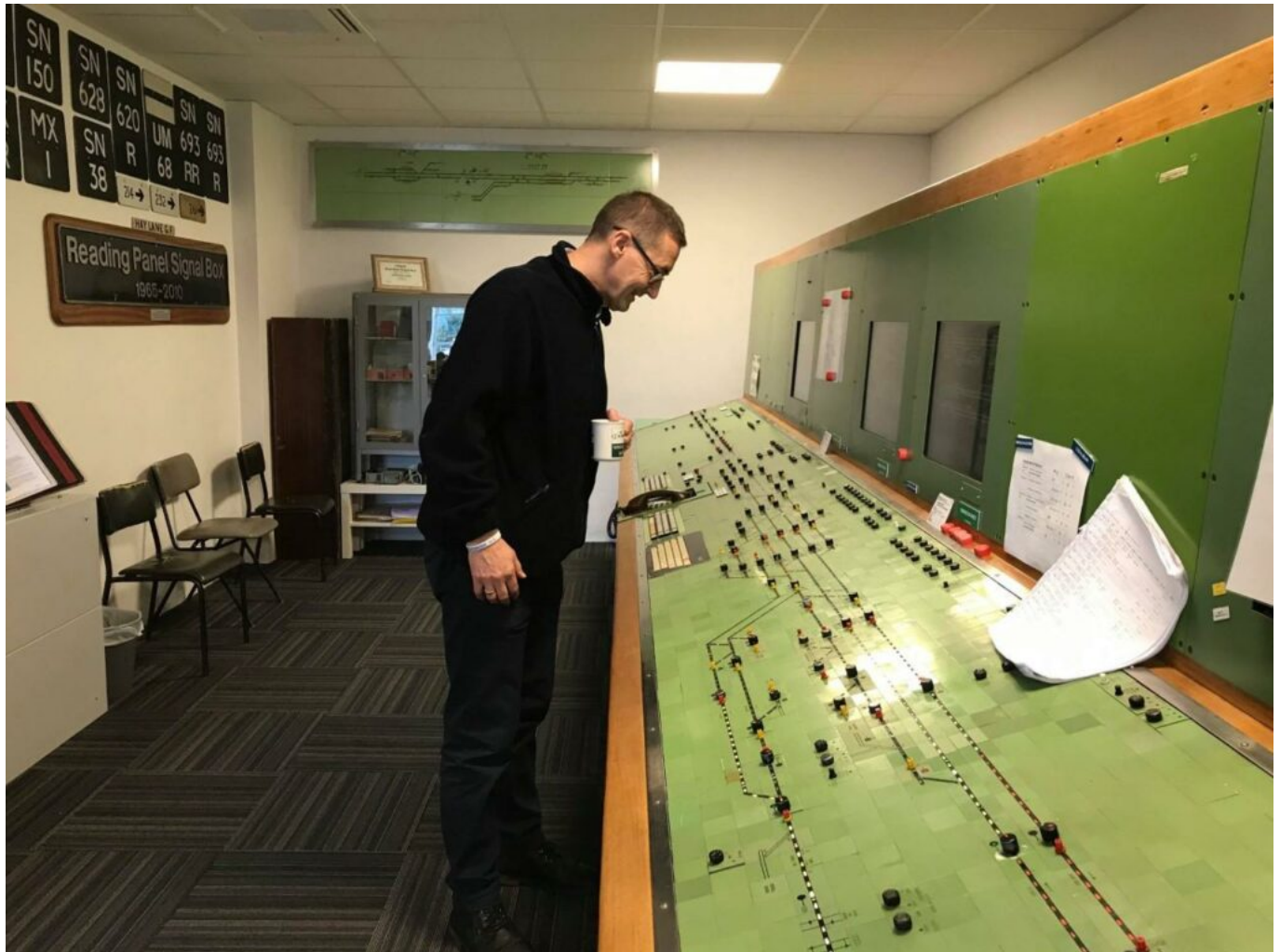


Heritage railway centre helps Network Rail combat coronavirus cancellations

April 23, 2020



Didcot Railway Centre and Swindon Panel Society are proud to be helping Network Rail during this Coronavirus period.

The two heritage charities made their facilities available to enable Network Rail to prepare for train service delivery in the event of a shortage of regular signallers due to Coronavirus or the measures to prevent its spread.

Former Network Rail signallers who have moved to other roles in the organisation started a series of refresher courses on 31 March using the preserved Swindon Panel which is part of the collection of restored locomotives, carriages, buildings and equipment cared for at the 21-acre railway centre.

The Panel was used to control trains on the Great Western mainline from 1968 until 2016, after which it was bought by SPS and painstakingly restored as the centre piece of DRC's Signalling Centre and, in

normal times, is now used to demonstrate railway signalling to the adults and children of all ages that visit DRC.

The high-accuracy simulator equipment designed and installed by volunteers to ensure the panel's controls and indications work exactly as they did when it was in service, mean that NR trainers can use the panel to simulate scenarios that might occur on track including signal failures, train breakdowns, signals passed at danger and rescuing failed trains.

Danny Scroggins, Swindon Panel Society Chairman said: "We are delighted that we have been able to help out Network Rail at these unprecedented times."

DRC's Chief Executive, Emma Jhita, added: "It's brilliant the Panel has proved such a useful resource for the re-training and upskilling of additional Network Rail staff – a real credit to the volunteers and the remarkable restoration work they have done. It is particularly rewarding that the Centre can make a positive contribution during this time that we are unfortunately closed to the public."

Mike Gallop, Network Rail's route director for Western, said: "We are extremely grateful to the Swindon Panel Society for taking us in and enabling us to train extra signallers.

"The panel is of an excellent standard and allows signallers to learn vital skills in a realistic environment.

"Those being trained would ordinarily be in the control room but to reduce the risk of spreading the virus we are not allowing visitors into those areas."

Photo credit: Jamie Brooker