

THE BEAUTY-IN-WAITING FOR OXFORD ROAD

IT'S ONE OF THOSE questions that surfaces at Didcot every so often: "When is Heyford station building going to be rebuilt at Oxford Road?" Well, the wait is almost over.

Ever since the creation of Didcot's main demonstration line (or 8 Road) there has been a long-term ambition to install an authentic GWR country station at the Oxford end of the line. The opportunity to acquire a 'real' station came 35 years ago when British Rail decided to rationalise Heyford station by replacing the Brunellian building with a simple shelter. We were told that if we could take the old building away by a certain date, we could have it!

A GWS team was gathered and got stuck into the Herculean task of dismantling the old building, carefully taking it apart stone-by-stone to incur the least possible damage. With the stones catalogued, they were moved to Didcot and have been awaiting reassembly ever since.

In the intervening years the development of Didcot Railway Centre has placed huge demands on the Civil Engineering team and the Heyford project never quite reached the head of the queue - until now. There is strong interest among volunteers in progressing the rebuild and the GWS Board has approved the laying of foundations, so work is expected to begin in Spring 2021, appropriately the Society's 60th anniversary year.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of this building. It is one of the 'Box' type stations - so named after the 1855 station building at Box in Wiltshire which set



Above: Heyford's main station building, still in-situ on 17 September 1983. The all-round canopy had been removed earlier in the BR era. **Martin Loader**

Below: The site at Oxford Road for reconstruction of the Heyford building has been prepared for the foundation slab, seen on 12 March 2020. An early benefit of the scheme will be to bring the adjacent section of the Oxford Road platform into use for visitors. **Frank Dumbleton**



would be great to hear from a stonemason too. But most volunteers start off with few skills and learn quickly - it's a project you will be able to see through from start to finish and it should be a lot of fun. So, if you would like to get involved at any level, Tim Part would like to hear from you at tim.part@outlook.com. Apart from being a splendid addition to DRC, just imagine how nice it will be to sit in the shade of the station canopy in the afternoon sun awaiting the next arrival!

Provisional floor plan for the restored Heyford station building

