

# Romsey Signal Box Project

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## "THE SIGNAL"

This is the first of what will hopefully be a quarterly newsletter. I hope you find it interesting and useful.

This first Newsletter is long, but I am aiming to give as broad a background about the Romsey Signalbox Project as possible, to explain to all readers just what the Project is and how they can get involved.

The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are my own and have not been ratified by the Transport Heritage Committee.

### WHO IS THIS NEWSLETTER BEING SENT TO ?

Firstly, there are all sorts of people who are or have at some time been involved in the Project, even in the smallest capacity. This newsletter will keep them in touch with progress, and let them know how they may be able to assist further.

Secondly, the Project exists fundamentally in order to develop an educational resource for Hampshire. This first Newsletter is being sent to all schools in the area around Romsey, to let them know what opportunities the Project affords them.

Thirdly, the Project would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of firms and organisations, large and small. We wish to keep them informed of progress.

Finally, publicity for the project is essential. All the local papers are invited to select material for publication.

### HOW YOU CAN RESPOND

For starters, if we are to build a team large enough to undertake all the work involved, we will need yet more volunteers. We would welcome anyone who could assist - readers and/or friends and relatives. Volunteers don't have to be interested in railways - just a special skill, or even the mere ability to handle a spade.

Then, as far as the schools are concerned, the Cowley Bridge signalbox will be available for demonstration from April 1991 onwards. Any school or exhibition which would like us to bring the mobile demonstrator to them for their summer fete or for a morning or afternoon during school time is invited to get in touch with me.

My address is at the head of this Newsletter; my home phone number is Romsey 522979. I very much look forward to hearing from you. We need your support.

Dick Hewett  
Project Manager

February 1991

## WHAT PRECISELY IS THE ROMSEY SIGNALBOX PROJECT ?

The Project basically consists of two parts:

1. The restored Romsey signalbox, with:
  - the lever frame connected to working instruments and to a simulator in the ground floor of the signalbox;
  - a full-size point and signals linked to the spare levers;
  - other associated artifacts, information, and displays at the signalbox site, relating to Romsey's transport history in general (including the nearby canal).
2. A working, mobile replica of Cowley Bridge Junction signalbox, connected to a second simulator.

What are the Project's Aims and Objectives?

- Primarily, to educate and provide pleasure;
- To develop an educational resource;
- To preserve some of Romsey's history;
- To develop an interest in transport history and signalling in particular.

The Terms of reference of the Project are:

"To oversee, on behalf of the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust and Hampshire County Council, the development and management of the Trust's land (and the signal box) at the Romsey Infants School, for the purposes of education."  
 (In this context, "education" applies to the whole community. It is hoped that the site will also be opened up to the general public once suitable arrangements can be made.)

## WHAT WILL SCHOOLS GET OUT OF IT ?

1. The history of signalling and how it works.
2. Transport history studies generally.
3. Opportunities for studying mechanics at close quarters.
4. Opportunities for other subjects (e.g gradients can be used for studies of acceleration).

Schools will be invited to send representatives to see the site sometime during the summer term.

A set of easily assembled display boards, describing the Project, with lots of colour pictures of work to date, are available for display in schools. Please contact the Project Manager.

It is hoped to have a slide presentation available by the summer, and a video is in preparation covering the history of signalling. A further video covering the Project in general may follow later.

## WHO IS FUNDING THE PROJECT ?

The Project is supported by Hampshire County Council and Test Valley Borough Council, who gave the original grants to enable the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust to purchase the necessary land. Continued funding by Hampshire County Council and the Trust covers costs which are incurred in association with the efforts of the volunteer Project Team.

## 1. ROMSEY SIGNALBOX AND ITS SITE

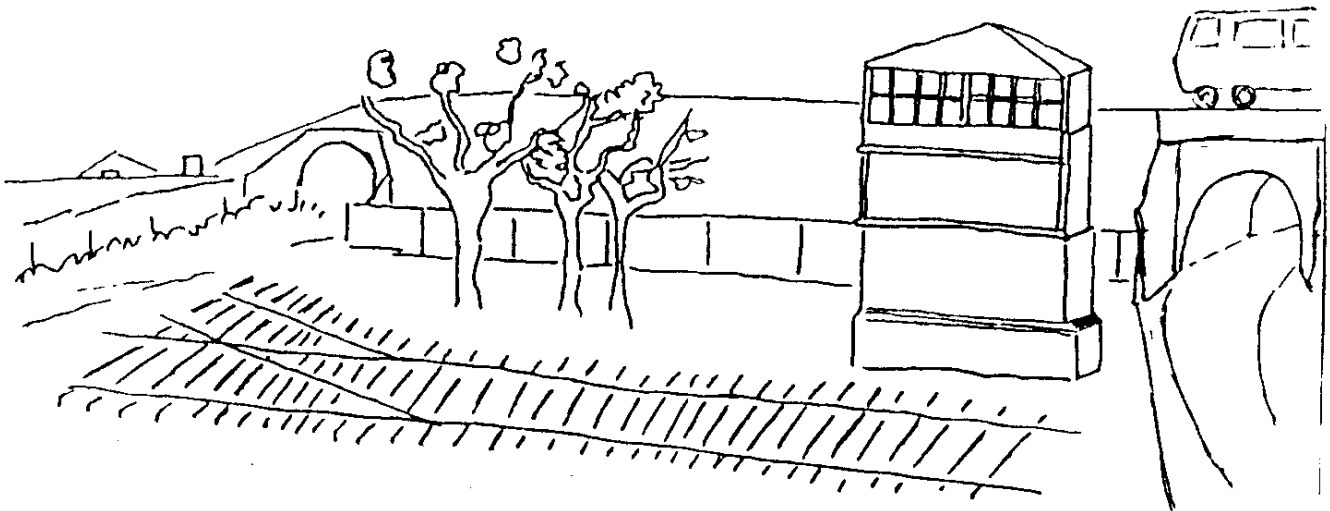
### A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SIGNALBOX AND THE PROJECT

Romsey Signalbox was built in about 1872 soon after the line from Southampton was opened to a junction at Romsey with the original Eastleigh-Salisbury line. After over 110 years' service, it closed in 1982, when control of the Romsey area was taken over by the Eastleigh Panel Box.

Moves were soon made to secure the box for further use, and in June 1983, the wooden box and frame were lifted off their railside base, swung across the tracks, and deposited on the embankment side near the Romsey Infants School. Both items remained there for four years until the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust had purchased a piece of land from British Rail and constructed a new base for the signalbox, onto which the lever frame and wooden first floor building were lifted in 1987. In 1990 part of the site was cleared and a point laid in front of the box.

### THE CURRENT SITUATION

The signalbox stands in its own enclosed site next to the railway embankment, at the rear of Romsey Infants School, off Winchester Road, Romsey. Currently access is only through the school grounds.



The structure of the box itself has been repaired, but more work is needed to restore it to full working order. The lever frame is virtually complete, and the block shelf on which all the signalling instruments stand has been rebuilt using part of that rescued in 1990 from Weymouth Signalbox. The point outside requires only a few track pins and slight extension, and two small railway trolleys await restoration. The rest of the site consists of a few trees, otherwise only low brambles and weeds.

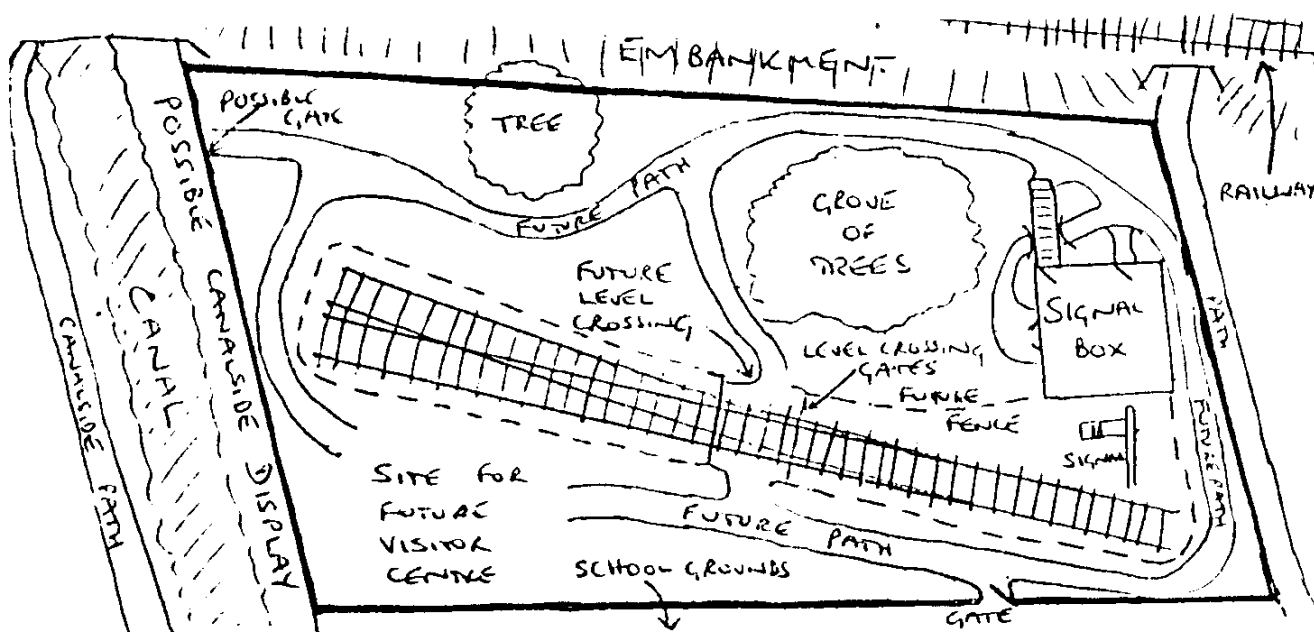
Work has commenced on the construction of a simulator which will be located in the ground floor of the box and which, when connected to the instruments upstairs, will simulate the actions of the neighbouring boxes along the lines from Romsey.

## FUTURE PLANS FOR THE SIGNALBOX SITE

The next tasks include:

- collecting and mounting several signal posts, including that being very generously donated to the Project by Ralph Brewer and another purchased from the Mid-Hants Railway;
- connecting the point and signals to the box's lever frame;
- the completion of all the wiring in and between the simulator and the instruments on the block shelf;
- improvements to site security;
- the construction of pathways around the site;
- and the restoration of the first trolley.

By the time the site is to be opened up for schools' use, the point will be fenced off and other artifacts displayed round the site.



In the longer term, it is hoped to acquire a suitable small building or railway vehicle of some sort to act as a visitor centre (the box itself is not that big); to develop the potential of the canalside location; and to improve access to the site from outside.

The target dates for opening the Signalbox site are:

- Stage One complete - site open for schools' use: Sept 1991;
- Stage Two complete - visitor centre etc in place: Dec 1992.

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## 2. COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE, MOBILE SIGNALBOX

### WHAT IS IT FOR ?

A visit to the restored Romsey Signalbox will enable schools to learn all about signalling, and transport history in general at full size. However such visits take time and money, at a time when there is increasing pressure on funds and the National Curriculum is restricting freedom in the school timetable.

To overcome this problem, Cowley Bridge Junction is a miniature working signalbox which can be taken to schools and exhibitions. Watching the display at work can give a very good impression of life in an old mechanical signalbox.

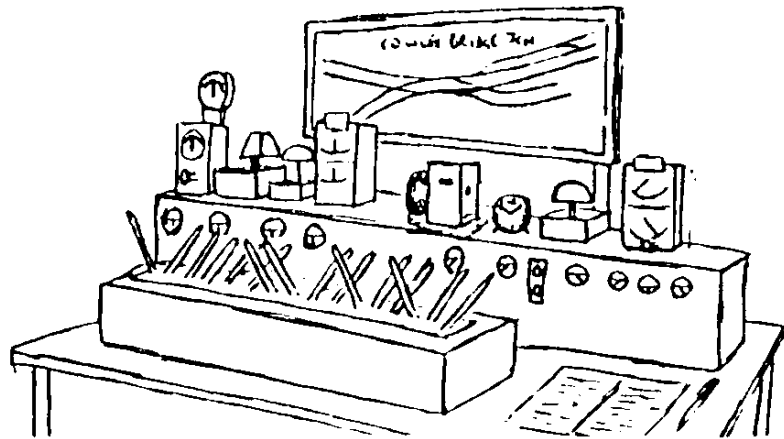
### WHY COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION ?

Cowley Bridge, a famous railway junction near Exeter, was selected because it offers intensive working over a track layout which is interesting without being too large or complicated. The actual miniature box has been developed from an earlier project in which George Pryer was involved with the Signalling Record Society.

### WHAT DOES IT CONSIST OF ?

The exhibit is small enough when dismantled to be transported in a hatchback car. It consists of three functional parts:

- the miniature lever frame;
- a full-size block shelf with all its instruments;
- and a simulator panel which simulates the next signalboxes up each line from Cowley Bridge, enabling the operator to exchange messages with them just like the prototype.



In addition, display boards give a full description of the operation and history of Cowley Bridge and the Project in general.

### COWLEY BRIDGE PROGRESS

The miniature display is now almost complete:

- The Block shelf is almost fully equipped with authentic full-size instruments.
- The miniature lever frame requires only the addition of the drop boxes and associated electrical "locking".
- The simulator requires only its final coat of paint.
- The display boards will soon be attached to the main display.

### COWLEY BRIDGE: THE GRAND LAUNCH

Cowley Bridge Signalbox will be officially launched at the Talyllyn Railway Preservation Society (Wessex Area)'s Model Railway Exhibition at the Fernham Hall, Fareham, on Saturday 6 April at 10am, when Adrian Vaughan, well-known ex-signalman and railway author, who has supplied various photographs and information for Cowley Bridge, will perform some suitable ceremony. It is hoped that representatives from the Heritage Committee and the Project Team will be present, as well as the local press. We also plan to invite Peter Jordan with his own model of Cowley Bridge Junction.

### TRAINING SESSIONS ON THE COWLEY BRIDGE DISPLAY

Cowley Bridge requires a minimum of two operators, one out front operating the miniature frame, one behind on the simulator, but ideally it should be manned by three or even four people at a time, so that spare operators are available to talk to viewers.

Clearly there is a need for quite a large team of operators. The Cowley Bridge Signalmen (and women!) are undergoing a thorough course in operating the display, such that they can eventually be "passed out" to operate it unassisted. We really need up to 15 operators by the time we go "live" in April, so that we can provide sufficient cover for the many demonstrations we hope to give. At present we have 8 operators. Training sessions are held most Tuesdays and Fridays (see the Calendar of Events on the back page).

Anyone who thinks they may be interested in joining us (lower age limit 14) would be welcome to come along to one of our Training sessions with no commitment on either side. Please contact Dick Hewett (Romsey 522979) or Bill Tyndall (Romsey 512410).

### FUTURE PLANS FOR COWLEY BRIDGE

From April 6th, Cowley Bridge will be available for demonstration at schools and exhibitions on a regular basis (subject to operators' availability). No doubt modifications will continue but the main display unit will be available to publicise the Project and to bring signalling almost to children's doorsteps.

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### PROJECT ORGANISATION

#### THE TRANSPORT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

The Project is being run by a Committee representing all the various interested organisations. This Committee includes:

- Hampshire County Council (Assistant County Secretary Ted Mason, who also represents the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust);
- Hampshire Education Committee (local Area Education Officer Alex Munro);
- Romsey Infants School (Headmistress Audrey Gebbie);
- a Governor of the Infants School (Kevin O'Riordan);
- a parent representative/Project Manager (Dick Hewett);
- Romsey Community School (Deputy Head Dorothy Baverstock);
- and two Technical experts (George Pryer and Bill Tyndall).

#### THE PROJECT TEAM

In March 1990 a formal Project Team was established under a voluntary Project Manager. Dick Hewett, already a parent representative, had no technical abilities, but his experience in Administration, Management and Marketing have enabled the project to progress at a much faster rate than before. He has introduced a project programme with a specific timetable.

The main Technical Team consists of three people.

- George Pryer, our Operating Supervisor, is still employed by BR as a signalman. He currently works on the Eastleigh panel box, which includes Romsey. His operating experience and personal interest in all things connected with signalling have been the catalyst for the Project.
- Bill Tyndall, our Technical and Operating Coordinator, once worked the Romsey signalbox as a BR signalman. His energy and enthusiasm have been instrumental in getting the project off the ground, and his links with the road haulage community have been of particular assistance.
- Ian Maxwell probably feels he moved to the area just at the wrong time! Ian is our Technical Expert, a qualified Signals & Telecommunications man with BR who continues to tackle all the technical aspects of both Cowley Bridge and the Romsey box. The Project is indebted to him for his dedication.

The Cowley Bridge Signalmen are trained under the watchful eyes of working signalman George Pryer and ex-signalman Bill Tyndall.

- Team A, the express team, includes Chris Hack, Richard Sanderson and Alison Gilmour. They meet on Fridays.
- Team B, the more steady all-stops team, includes Dick Hewett, Robin Allwood and Richard Reed.

As stressed elsewhere, we want to expand our team to at least 15 members, and further volunteers are welcomed.

The Romsey Signalbox Technical Team: A number of volunteers have already come forward to offer assistance with particular aspects of the site's development, with skills essential to the project's successful completion:

- Our furniture expert Alan Barnes has restored superbly the two desks in the signalbox to their original condition. We hope the cupboards will be his next project.
- Gordon Couling has thankfully assumed responsibility for keeping the brambles and nettles under control, with a programme of regular treatment with weedkiller.
- Our surveyor Barry Marsh's measurements enabled us to spread a reasonably level trackbed for the point. He is surveying the track (now laid but not flat!) for our gradient posts!

There are many other tasks which, whilst not having any direct relation to railways, still require a specialist of some type:

- Rewiring the signalbox;
  - Stripping, cleaning, and repainting the levers;
  - Improving the security of the site from vandalism and burglars;
  - Wooden fence and gate construction;
  - Sign painting;
  - The construction of internal and weatherproof display boards;
- and many more besides.

The Project Team is small and an awful lot of work is falling upon a few shoulders. Offers of assistance with any of the above tasks (and others) would be more than gratefully received.

Other non-specialist volunteers have assisted with labour-intensive tasks such as site clearance and ballast shifting, particularly

over Easter 1990. They include parents of Romsey Infants School children and colleagues of those on the Project. Further opportunities for such volunteers to help are shown on the Calendar of Events below - 9/10 and 28/29 March being the next dates.

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#### ASSISTANCE FOR THE PROJECT FROM FIRMS AND ORGANISATIONS

Apart from our main sponsors, a number of firms and organisations, both large and small, have provided assistance to the Project. Our thanks are extended to all of the following (in no order of priority - all assistance is welcome!):

British Rail donated the point and extra sleepers, together with the trollies; facilitated the removal of the signalbox in the first place; assisted with the unloading of the trackwork and its restoration en situ; and generally smoothed the way for various other items for both Romsey and Cowley Bridge.

Foster Yeoman's trains rumble past the box every night laden with stone. Their valuable donation was 80 tons of ballast for the point. The ballast was collected from Somerset in transport provided free by Hilton Transport Services.

Plant & Tools Ltd, Southdown Plant, Marsh Plant, and Wessex Petroleum Ltd supplied equipment and fuel at generous terms for the clearance and lifting operations at Easter 1990.

Staff and pupils at the Romsey Community School, Eastleigh Technical College and Crestwood School, Eastleigh constructed various items for both Cowley Bridge and the Romsey box.

Finally, apart from British Rail, the Romsey Venture Scouts and the Southampton Community Service both provided labour at critical moments during site clearance and point laying.

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#### FUTURE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Day	Date	Event	People involved
Tues	Feb 19	Cowley Bridge training session at Redbridge	Team B
Tues	Feb 26	Cowley Bridge training session at Redbridge	Team B
Fri	Mar 1	Cowley Bridge training session at Redbridge	Team A
Sat	Mar 9	Dig out and dismantle Ralph Brewer's signal	) Labourers
Sun	Mar 10	Transport signal to Signalbox site	) needed
Tues	Mar 5	Cowley Bridge training session at Redbridge	Team B
Tues	Mar 12	Transport Heritage Committee Meeting, 8-9am	Committee
Tues	Mar 12	Cowley Bridge training session at Redbridge	Team B
Fri	Mar 15	Cowley Bridge training session at Redbridge	Team A
Thur	Mar 28	) Site clearance/path laying/trench digging	) Labourers
Fri	Mar 29	) /bank construction/signal raising/etc.	) needed
Sat	Apr 6	COWLEY BRIDGE LAUNCH: Fernham Hall, Fareham	Teams A & B
Mon	May 13	Publication of next Newsletter	Proj. Man.