

# Romsey Signal Box Project

Project Manager: R.B.Hewett

42 Botley Road, Romsey, Hampshire SO51 8AP

## "THE SIGNAL"

No 3 - March 1992

Dear Reader,

This third issue of "The Signal" includes articles, reports, and a diary of events. I hope you find it useful and interesting.

### To anyone involved in education

The Romsey Signalbox Project was established to develop the preserved Romsey Signalbox as an educational resource for schoolchildren from across Hampshire. That remains the core aim, but more support is needed from the educationalists themselves if this aim of the Project is not to flounder. To that end, a special Open Evening for teachers is being held on Thursday 7th May from 4.30-6pm. If you are in education in any way, put it in your diary now! We would like to show you what the Project can already offer, and discuss further improvements to meet your needs.

### Progress - on site, and financial

The Project has made dramatic strides forward over the last 6 months, including in particular the successful connection of the point and signals to the lever frame.

Benefactors continue to come forward. The latest are Southern Electricity, whose exceptional generosity involved connecting us to the mains at no cost. This benevolent act has enabled us to start fitting lighting, heating and power points inside the box, and we can now make real progress towards the complete restoration to working order.

In addition a grant of £1,000, originally intended to pay for an electric supply, has been made by Hampshire County Council. Expensive work to improve site security and procure further necessary materials can now be started with firm financial backing.

Meanwhile our fame is spreading, and Cowley Bridge Junction miniature signalbox is being requested for model railway exhibitions throughout the south of England. We have just been asked to display in Tolworth, south London, in November, and were only prevented from displaying at Bristol next month through severe last-minute restrictions on exhibition space.

### Opening to the Public

One very successful Open Day in September was enough to convince everyone that the event was worth repeating more than once again. A report is elsewhere in this newsletter.

### Volunteers

We have an increasingly dedicated hardcore of volunteers who brave

the elements every other Saturday morning to progress work, including new Team members Richard Beton, Trevor Foulkes and Chris Smith; Trevor makes the effort to travel every fortnight from Salisbury for working sessions. A full programme of dates is detailed in the diary. I hope that by the time I write the next "Signal" newsletter, it will give news of a definite completion date for the internal restoration of the box.

My thanks to everyone, named or unnamed in this Newsletter, who has assisted in any way to date - and here's to your continued help!

Dick Hewett  
Project Manager

25 February 1992

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### THE SIGNALBOX AND SITE: PROGRESS REPORT

The programme of work has certainly accelerated since the last Newsletter in June 1991.

#### Work achieved since June 1991

The Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust re-roofed and re-guttered the signalbox during August and September. As already mentioned, Southern Electricity completed the connection to the mains electricity supply in the school in January.

During the summer, the Signalbox Project Team:

- Re-painted the outside of the signalbox itself,
- Restored the lever frame, levers, and the new block shelf,
- Raised and connected the two signals to lever nos 3 and 5,
- Connected the point to lever no 4,
- Made significant progress on the restoration of the furniture,
- Collected many more materials for the site, (including a distant signal arm from Inverness),
- Laid various paths and made other improvements.

#### Further work programme for 1992

Current work (during the winter) includes:

- Re-wiring the inside of the box (lights and power points),
- Re-equipping the signalbox with necessary instruments,
- Wiring these up to the simulator panel downstairs,
- Connecting a 3-aspect colour light signal (outside) to the frame,
- Fitting shutters to all the windows,
- Touching up any more painting,
- Completing the fitting out of furniture in the box.

Over the rest of the spring/summer, the Project Team aim to:

- Complete the internal wiring of the signalbox,
- Replace the broken glass in the windows and door,
- Improve site security generally,
- Complete the restoration of the inside of the box,
- Build a small level crossing halfway along the point,
- Connect the distant signal to the outside ground frame.

## OPEN DAY, SEPTEMBER 22ND 1991

Our first-ever Open Day for the general public was an outstanding success, both financially and as a public relations exercise, partly because it happened to coincide with those for the Romsey Police and Fire Stations (a coincidence we are planning to repeat in 1992). The signalbox was full from soon after opening at 10am until closing at 5pm. We believe over 250 visitors came.

In addition Cowley Bridge was operating in the School Hall, and the Romsey and District Railway Modellers Society brought three model railway layouts (as added interest). The book stall was well-frequented, and refreshments were served from the kitchen.

Many visitors were invited to complete a questionnaire before leaving. This showed that all those who visited would want to come again to see further progress. Most respondents found the signalbox and its history very interesting, with Cowley Bridge, the display boards and the model railways only slightly less so. A number of new volunteers stepped forward at the Open Day.

The Project's new guide book was on sale at 20p (or more!) and over 100 copies were sold. In addition a number of other books supplied on a sale-or-return basis by a local dealer were sold. In all, with several donations, over £110 profit was made for funds.

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## PUBLIC OPENINGS IN THE FUTURE

The Project Team were so encouraged by the Open Day that they have decided to hold several Open Days during 1992. Dates are:

- Sunday 26th April (the weekend after the Easter work-in);
- Sunday 21st June (the second day of BR's Steam Specials on the Salisbury-Eastleigh line);
- Sunday 6th September (to be confirmed - planned for the same day as the Police and Fire Station Open Days).

Then finally it is hoped there will be a celebration of the restoration of the box to working order on Saturday 17th October (10 years to the day since the box was closed). This is a tough target - but one the Project Team believe they can achieve.

In 1993 the Project Team hope to be able to open on a more regular basis (staffing permitting), and to advertise themselves in the railway preservation press.

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## PUBLICITY/PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

### Talks/Presentations

We have now built up quite a respectable slide collection which can be used for talks and presentations. Anyone aware of opportunities for talks/presentations should contact the Project Manager.

Photograph/slide collection

We are always looking to improve our slide and photograph collection. Anyone who has taken photos of any aspect of the Project is invited to send a copy to the Project Manager.

Press Cuttings

We like to keep track of all the publicity given to the Project. If anyone spots an article, however small, in any newspaper or magazine, or hears reference to the Project on radio or TV, please let the Project Manager know, sending a copy of any printed material if possible. (We don't always submit them ourselves!)

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COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE. MOBILE SIGNALBOXDisplays

Cowley Bridge Junction is nearing completion, and is now being made available on a more regular basis to model railway exhibitions where it provides a contrasting display to the usual diet of standard railway layouts and sales stands. The bell codes are becoming an aural trademark wherever Cowley Bridge is displayed.

New operators wanted!

Cowley Bridge does however rely on one particular commodity which is invariably in short supply - operators. More regular displays stretch limited volunteer resources. The Project Team would be delighted if new volunteers came forward.

You don't have to have any expertise in the operation of a signalbox - full tuition is provided. It can be fun as well as instructional. You can break all the rules without actually causing harm. The Project Manager himself, still very much a novice when it comes to operating the signalbox, has managed to pull off all the signals and points for a train heading east - when in fact the train was travelling on the other line in the opposite direction! (Whether those watching actually realised is debatable - and no one owned up at the time!)

A diary of Cowley Bridge displays is shown at the foot of the newsletter. Anyone wanting training should ring either Bill Tyndall on Romsey 512410 or Chris Hack on Romsey 40394.

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A POINT OF SAFETY

Ian Maxwell writes:

Railways can be very dangerous places to be. On British Rail strict rules apply to ensure that staff and customers are not hurt. At Romsey we will have to ensure safety measures are considered so as to avoid accidents happening.

Two of the most serious potential hazards are the tips of the point which move back and forth when someone out of sight pulls the lever in the signalbox. With enthusiastic children (and parents!) keen to learn, the chance of someone's fingers or feet being trapped are very real.

The safety measures will be a combination of technology and procedures. The procedures, while not finalised yet, will centre around there being sufficient trained staff inside and outside the box keeping inquisitive fingers clear of danger.

These procedures will be backed up by an electrically operated lock on the lever activated by a special key. To pull or push the lever the key must first be turned, thus preventing accidental movements. The key will also ring a bell outside by the point tips as a warning that the points are about to move.

Finally a mirror will be installed to allow the person operating the lever to see that the point tips are clear. We're still looking for a suitable convex mirror (the type they have in shops for looking around a wide area), so if you know where we can get one, let us know.

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## HOW DO YOU TEACH RAILWAY SIGNALLING?

Ian Maxwell also writes:

While planning how to make the best use of the Signalbox it has been important to keep in mind the primary aim, that of providing an educational opportunity to learn about signalling, signalling equipment and the way of life of the signaller. Our main concern therefore must be to keep the technology simple: after all, we may be asked to explain how it all works one day.

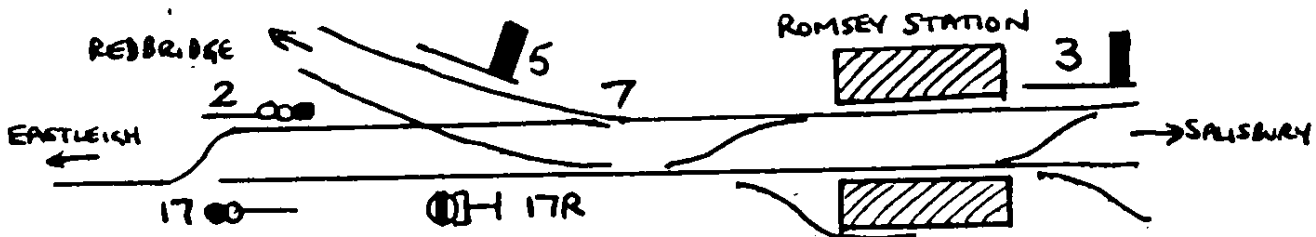
Signalling equipment and indeed the way it is operated looks quite bewildering and highly complicated, but in fact it can be broken down into a number of quite simple elements.

The most complex part to be understood is without doubt the equipment operated by the signaller. However the operating floor of the signalbox is the focal point of the site and needs to reflect as accurately as possible the original condition so as to set the scene for visitors. To help explain what all the equipment does, a series of working displays are planned. The two most important of these will be:

1. A pair of block bells and block instruments so that people can have a go at sending bell codes and block information.
2. A small model railway designed to show how the position of trains are indicated on the signaller's diagram.

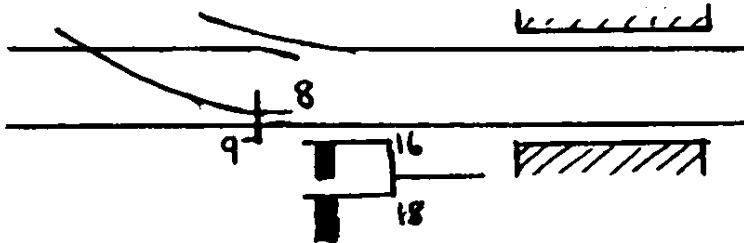
To demonstrate external signalling equipment there will be examples of real pieces of equipment arranged so as to show how they work and relate to each other. The equipment is being set out so that it represents real parts of the track layout at Romsey. The signals and point already working represent signals 3 and 5 and

point 7, whilst another signal is due to arrive shortly for connection to lever no 2.



Also planned is an example of a banner repeat signal (used when the main signal couldn't be seen by an approaching train for a full 200 yards). This will repeat a two aspect colour light signal (no 17).

A new idea we have had is to fit another set of points with a Facing Point Lock (FPL), and mechanical detection linked to signals 16 and 18. The FPL is needed when passenger trains pass over points in the "facing" direction, whilst the mechanical detector is needed for the signals leading up to the points.



### Help! Items still needed

We're still looking for equipment to complete these plans. Perhaps you know where we could find the following:

- Bits of model railway.
- Banner signal.
- Rodding, cranks, connectors etc for mechanical points with FPL.
- Mechanical detector with 2 slides.
- Stock and switch rails, chairs, sleepers (we've only got room for about 1.5m either side of the tips).
- 2-arm gantry signal (for signals 16 and 18).

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### THE LIFE OF BRIAN

The Project Manager recently asked an innocent question: What was the story behind the source of our distant signal, which has come to us from Inverness? He received this response from an exasperated Ian Maxwell, by now fed up with the PM's questions:

"Once upon a time there was a boy called Brian who lived with his parents a very long way north of Watford near somewhere called Loch Ness. One day while walking by the Loch hoping to see a monster he saw instead some men dismantling a semaphore distant signal. Since he was a rail enthusiast he asked if he could have the signal and the men said yes.

The signal was very heavy but eventually he got it home feeling very proud of himself, but when his mother saw the signal she said it couldn't come in the house and would have to stay outside in the cold and wet.

Some years later when Brian lived in Reading, he heard about a signalbox restoration project. He thought that his distant signal, which had been neglected for 6 years and was feeling rather lonely, could be put to good use. So he went back to Scotland and brought the signal arm all the way back to Reading and then to Romsey. And soon (I hope) the signal was working again and everyone lived happily ever after. (Except that some bloke called Dick kept asking questions about where the signal came from.)

The End"

(That'll teach me!)

(In truth, Brian Green works for the Area S & T Engineer at Reading, in the BR Telecomm Minor Works section, and we thank him for his generosity. The distant arm used to guard the line out from Inverness towards Nairn. Soon it will guard our level crossing and be operational by children from our ground frame.)

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#### ITEMS FOR SALE

We now have a stock of books relating to transport networks through Romsey, and can order others. All stocks have been acquired at generous discount, with profits going to Project funds. Books include:

- "After The Rhinoceros - a story of Romsey's Railways" (LTVAS, 1983): £2.50.
- Middleton Press pictorial histories:
  - "Andover to Southampton" (railway): £8.95.
  - "Fareham to Salisbury" (railway): £7.95.
  - "Hampshire's Waterways" (canal): (Price on request).
- Signalbox Project Guide: 20p or more.
- Back issues of "The Signal": 10p each.

Copies of all these are available from the Project Manager, and will be on sale whenever Cowley Bridge is on display.

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#### OTHER RECENT ASSISTANCE

Apart from those already mentioned, the following have provided significant assistance over the last 6 months:

*Andy Bott* dug our trench for us, to permit the electricity supply to be laid.

*Whiteley Electronics of Mansfield* donated a telephone concentrator identical to the model which used to be in Romsey box.

The *Mid-Hants Railway* have come to our rescue with the all-important recipes for the paint for the signalbox!

Our thanks are extended to all of them, and anyone we've forgotten.

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS UNTIL THE END OF 1992

All Project Team volunteers are reminded of the following dates which they should note in their diaries.

#### Formal events/displays

Sat Apr 4 Cowley Bridge display at Fareham  
 Sat Apr 25 Cowley Bridge display at Salisbury  
 Sun Apr 26 Open Day, Signalbox Site (with Cowley Bridge)  
 Thur May 7 Open Evening for Teachers (with Cowley Bridge)  
 Sun Jun 21 Open Day, Signalbox Site (with Cowley Bridge)  
 Sun Sep 6 Open Day, Signalbox Site (with Cowley Bridge)  
 Sat Oct 17 Open Day, Signalbox Site (with Cowley Bridge)  
 Sat Nov 14 Cowley Bridge display at Tolworth, Surbiton, Surrey  
 Sun Nov 15 (display at Tolworth continued)  
 Sat Nov 28 Cowley Bridge display at Lordshill (provisional)  
 Sun Nov 29 (display at Lordshill continued)

#### Working sessions

Working sessions will be held on the following *Saturdays* from 10am-1pm:

March 14th and 28th;  
 April 11th;  
 May 2nd, 16th and 30th;  
 June 13th and 29th;  
 July 4th and 25th.

Working sessions will also be held from 7-10pm on the following *Monday evenings*:

Apr 6th;  
 May 4th, 11th and 18th;  
 June 1st, 8th, 15th and 29th;  
 July 6th and 20th.

Finally the following sessions will be held over *Easter* from 10am-5pm each day:

Maundy Thursday April 16th,  
 Friday April 17th,  
 Easter Saturday April 18th.

There will be a break in formal sessions during August, though volunteers who want to work on site would be welcome to do so.

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Finally, just a reminder if you need to telephone:  
 Project Manager: Dick Hewett, tel: Romsey (0794) 522979.