

# Wild about... Signal and Telegraph



It's one of the biggest signalling projects around and from late September will make Quorn one of the most atmospheric - and potentially busy - places to watch trains. All well and good, but someone had to lay the four-miles of wiring, raise 11 signal posts and mount the arms... In our latest feature on life as a volunteer, we joined the Great Central's 'S&T' team.

BY MICHAEL WILD

**R**ain pours from the heavens, relentlessly pounding the windows of the former Market Rasen signalbox at Quorn and Woodhouse, Great Central Railway. Sadly though, I'll not be in the dry 'working the levers': Quorn's major signalling project has yet to be completed - and I'm here to help out. In fact, there aren't even any trains running, as this is a Friday and 'Signal and Telegraph' have a complete possession of the Quorn area.

But faced with a choice of staying in the 'box and watching volunteer Garry Churchward testing the lever frame and going outside in the pouring rain, I know which one I'd choose.

Fat chance: "Seeing as you're here, come

and help me outside" cracks my dripping host for the day, GCR S&T volunteer Richard Napier. It's not the most attractive invitation I've ever had: yesterday of course, there was brilliant sunshine...

I've joined the volunteers working on this 1½-mile site around Quorn to install 18 signals, a down siding, and to restore the trailing crossover to the north of the station's island platform. By the time it's complete in September the two-year project will have cost around £140,000 (the biggest single chunk of which came from a £30,000 grant from the Redland Lafarge Landfill Tax Scheme).

As well as the signals, over four miles of electrical cable (almost the equivalent of Loughborough to Quorn and back), and three miles of signal wire will have been laid.

Facing page: If you could have shown someone this 10-years ago - '04' 2-8-0, Gresley Pigeon van, double track and now signalling - they would have been astounded and this is bound to become a favourite photographic standpoint... '04' No. 63601 heads south from Quorn past some of the as yet un-commissioned signals in July. JOHN EAST.

When first I visited the site in May all the signal posts were up and the team were completing the wiring, installing the last of the ground signals and testing the lever frame.

By the end of August just the down 'Lie-by' siding remained to be completed, with testing and commissioning in full swing to make sure everything is ready for an inspection by Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate in mid-September.

When it's finished the new signalling will allow the railway to double train frequency between Loughborough and Quorn, making it potentially one of the busiest steam lines anywhere. Until then trains continue to run through the station, but with the new signals out of use - marked by a large cross.

After a little more persuasion, and not wanting to seem too un-willing, I was off to move a ground signal over to the west side of line. This will control movements into the new down 'Lie-by' to the south of the island platform.

If this had been a normal day, I would have been sat in front of a computer, hot cup of tea in hand and protected from the weather by double-glazing. But would I really rather be in the office or out here helping, even in a small way, to recreate the railway as it was? Despite the rain... I'd rather be here making a contribution.

## Water off a duck's back

Funnily enough, once I got started the rain became nothing more than a minor inconvenience. Just like the others, after a while I hardly noticed.

The first job was 'planting' the ground signal we'd just moved for the 'Lie-by'.

We moved the heavy casting of the base (around 75lb), complete with arm and an unpainted disk, across the station's barrow crossing using a platform trolley. For the last few yards across the down running line though, it had to be done by hand with Richard on one side and myself on the other.

Heavy lifting out of the way I asked Richard - a lifelong railway enthusiast and a solicitor in 'real life' - how he became involved at Quorn. His answer was simple: "I visited the railway about two years ago, saw the project and got involved. I hadn't done any signalling work before, but I find it really engrossing."

Three of us worked to position the signal (see diagram for its position) with guidance from S&T head Graham Banister to agree on its exact position and angle. The third member of our little team was Shawn Sanders, also enjoying a day in the open air: he's a Computer Engineer by trade.



How things have changed in just eight years... 'Jubilee' 4-6-0s Nos. 45593 *Kolhapur* and 45596 *Bahamas* head away from Quorn on July 1 1995, before the signalling or even the double track had been commissioned. JOHN EAST.



Adding the spindle casting to the spectacle plate for a signal arm, using the longest spanner I've ever seen! RICHARD NAPIER.

## Great Central Railway: the big three projects

**Swithland Sidings signalling:** Once Quorn is finished, the next stage is to signal Swithland sidings.

The project is expected to cost around £84,000. GCR Chairman John East told *Steam Railway*: "Swithland will be bigger and even more spectacular than Quorn. Most of the materials are already on site, so it's a case of doing it."

When complete the GCR will have a fully signalled 5½-mile double track line between Loughborough and Rothley, with a further 2½-miles of single track to Leicester North.

**Refurbishment of Loughborough station:** A scheme to refurbish the 1898-built station at Loughborough was launched in March (SR282). The railway is hoping to secure Heritage Lottery Funding towards the £1-million project. No start date has been set.

Work will include replacement of glass, iron and wood in the canopy where necessary, attention to brickwork and

refurbishment of the station accommodation. The goods lift will be re-installed and a 70ft extension added to the north end of the platform. The work will be carried out by a mixture of volunteers and contractors.

**Loughborough Locomotive Department:** Stanier 'Black Five' 4-6-0 No. 45305 returned to steam on August 1 and worked its first passenger trains on August 3 - the 35th anniversary of the end of regular steam hauled trains on BR (SR287). This is the first step in an exciting time. Three other locomotives are well on the way to completion: Riddles '2MT' 2-6-0 No. 78019, Maunsell 'N15' 4-6-0 No. 30777 *Sir Lamiel* and 'Black Five' 4-6-0 No. 45231. Completion of these will ease the railways recent dependence on Nos. 4141, 7821 and G3601 and, until July, 'WD' 2-10-0 No. 90775.

Work has also started to strip Gresley 'N2' 0-6-2T No. 69523 in preparation for overhaul.

► The hole for the ground signal had already been dug with two concrete blocks in place ready to bolt the casting down.

Next came challenge two: finding bolts of exactly the right length - long enough to secure the signal, but not too long that they protrude above the ground. It's this kind of simple problem that people like myself don't even think about. How many people even notice a ground signal as they rumble past in a train?

In the end we solved the problem by using longer bolts and cutting them to length.

Then we filled in the hole to secure the signal, packing the earth in tight. A small job admittedly, but a job done.

Whilst we were working on this single tiny element of the project, other S&T volunteers were swarming all over the site.

Just a few yards behind me a new point was being installed for the down siding, in the 'box' a group of trainee signal engineers were busy completing the wiring. To the north of the station people were working on the new crossover and another volunteer was working on one of the lineside wiring cabinets. Altogether there were 17 people on site and the work never stopped during the day.

Generally the GCR's S&T gang meets on Wednesday evenings and Saturdays. Once a month there's a larger working party when bigger jobs or several smaller jobs are tackled at once. But this week was a special 'Work Week': nine days of activity to 'get as much done as possible' towards completing Quorn's signalling.

In total 'S&T' has just over 30 members and an average of 17 turned out every day of the work-week - meaning that over 150 breakfasts were consumed during the nine days!

### A major scheme

Eight semaphore signals (including one bracket), seven ground signals and three colour lights (including one 'searchlight' signal on Quorn's platform) have been installed. None of the signals have a direct link with the Great Central Railway. The nearest is a Great Northern Railway lattice-post single-arm semaphore (from Leicester Belgrave Road) which will be used to control trains leaving the down 'Lie-by' siding. The others come from a variety of sources including Rectory Junction, Nottinghamshire.

The down siding is one of two significant track alterations (the first was the trailing crossover from the 'up' to the 'down' lines, completed in April this year). When finished, the 1,020ft long siding will be able to hold a fifteen-coach train or a 45-wagon freight - a significant boost to Quorn's operational capability.

On most running days Quorn's new

crossover and siding won't need to be used. But they'll come into their own during galas when a Loughborough-Quorn shuttle will be able to reverse and 'stage' in the down siding whilst a train from Leicester North to Loughborough passes through. Alternatively, demonstration freights can be held, allowing passenger trains to pass.

Maybe even more exciting is that the service frequency can be doubled from the current maximum of three trains an hour in each direction (at the moment it takes 20-minutes to clear the section from Loughborough to Rothley) to six. That means - potentially - a train every ten minutes in each direction.

Controlling all this is the former GCR signalbox from Market Rasen, acquired and installed here by the railway in 1981.

Whilst the 'box will be able to control trains between the two colour light signals ½-mile to the north of the station and ½-mile to the south, it will also be able to be 'switched out' so that on quieter days only Loughborough and Rothley 'boxes have to be manned.

The 1891-built wooden-clad signalbox has been completely refurbished. 29 levers of the original 32-lever frame will be used. All the relays downstairs are new along with all the wiring (over three-miles of it) which connect all the electrical equipment in the 'box.

### On false ground

So much for the 'big picture' - back to the hard work. Having already got a good coat of dirt on my new gloves, my next task was to help fit the signal arm to the 'up' starter.

This is a single arm on a bracket at the south end of Quorn station (see diagram). The bracket is 27ft above the ground, which means that all the parts and tools to fit the bracket had to be raised 27ft too. At least being a bracket signal there is somewhere to stand: on single post signals it can be even more hairy...

The first job was to fit the spindle casting, the metal bar which holds the signal arm in place, to the arm's spectacle plate.

Much to Richard's amusement I had to do this with the biggest adjustable spanner I've ever seen - 3ft long.

After a few short minutes the first part was ready to be fitted (the actual arm would be fitted later). The complete spindle casting is fairly cumbersome - about a foot long with the spectacle plate hanging on one end, and awkward to handle.

Armed with hard hats, we were now ready to fit the arm. At ground level there was very little wind. 27ft in the air however, it was pretty blustery - or perhaps it just felt like that to someone standing at the top of a signal for the first time.



I don't generally have a fear of heights, but as safe as the top of the bracket signal was... I still felt a little exposed, surrounded by nothing but some very basic steelwork.

In fact, this was quite a spur: the quicker we got the job done, the quicker I could get back on the ground!

Having carried the 'specplate' and spindle casting assembly down the yard by hand the next step was to raise it to the platform.

There's nothing like manual labour. We used a rope and pulley to haul the fitting and the tools we needed from ground level. The tools included a smaller, user friendly spanner, tenon saw and a large hammer.

Fitting the signal arm proved surprisingly easy. With the spindle casting greased before we set off from the yard it slid into place in the signal post and just required bolting in place. Two of us were needed to keep the assembly level and in position at the top of the bracket

An aerial view from the up 'starter' bracket signal highlights activity at Quorn on May 16. MICHAEL WILD.

signal whilst it was fixed in place.

Next was fitting of the arm. This had already been painted and just required bolting in place with five bolts. At this point, around an hour after I had started by fitting the spindle casting to the spectacle plate, it was beginning to look much more like a signal.

All that remained was to connect the signal wire to the actuator for the arm and fit the lamp and coloured aspects. For today at least we would only connect the signal to the wires. This involved cutting a small area from the edge of the platform at the top of the bracket signal so that the wire could be connected without fouling anything.

By the time we'd done that it was 6pm and the end of my enjoyable, if wet, day. By mid August the Permanent Way department was completing tracklaying in the siding. If given a clean bill of health by HMRT in September the

signalling will come into its own for the first time at the railway's October 11/12 Autumn Gala.

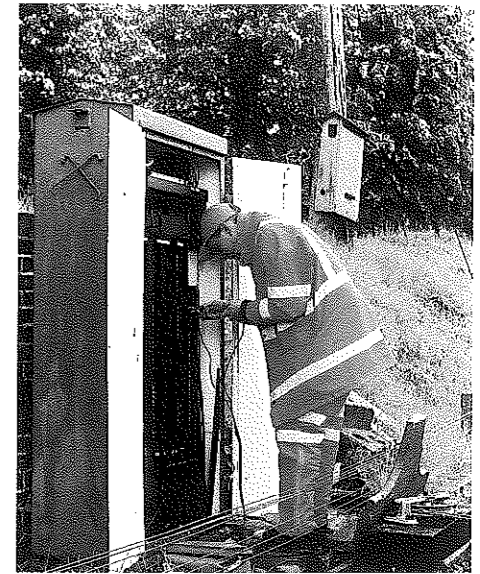
After all the work, Quorn should become the ultimate 'main line' preserved station overnight... and an even more popular place for photographs.

I know I'll be back, if only to say: "You see that signal arm way up there... I fitted that."

By then, the 'S&T' gang will be on with their next major task, signalling of Swithland sidings. So if you fancy lending a hand, there's plenty more to do! ■

### Want to help?

To join the Great Central Railway's signal and Telegraph department, you must be a society member. Contact Great Central Railway PLC, Great Central Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 1RW. Tel: 01509 230726.



GCR Signal and Telegraph volunteer Tim Barrett works on lineside cabinets at Quorn. MICHAEL WILD.



At the top of the 27ft high 'starter'... GCR.



South Devon and GCR volunteer Garry Churchward tests levers inside Quorn's signalbox - one of the few dry jobs on a very wet day! MICHAEL WILD.

