

# IRLAM STATION SIGNAL BOX

The magnificent Signal Box was obtained by the Railway Heritage Trust from Network Rail in 2018 for the Hamilton Davies Trust, a local grant giving and regeneration charity.

Look closely at the Signal Box and you will notice that it bears the sign Keighley Junction. This is because it was originally located in a Network Rail maintenance yard at Keighley, West Yorkshire.

Built in 1884, the Signal Box is the oldest surviving Midland 2A box in the UK and is a grade 2 listed building. Its 32 levers once controlled the junction between the Leeds main line and the Oxenhope (Worth Valley) branch line. When the line through Keighley was electrified in 1994 the Signal Box was moved 100 metres to the maintenance yard, where it lay deteriorating for 25 years.

Irlam once had a Signal Box very similar in size and design to the Keighley one, but it was demolished in 1971. It was felt, therefore, that Irlam would make the ideal home to secure its survival as a heritage piece as it would stand perfectly alongside the beautifully restored Station House.



Signal Box in transit from Keighley to Irlam

After gaining permission from Bradford City Council, Network Rail arranged to have it transported to Irlam on the 4th April 2019 to be restored and placed at Irlam Station.



Keighley Signal Box circa 2000 - the wooden lean-to was not original and was not part of the restoration

Restoring the Signal Box has been a labour of love, with great care and attention shown when dismantling and repairing it in order to respectfully bring it back to its former glory. This unique undertaking was managed by local company North Cheshire Developments, with the help and skills of a number of local contractors and craftsmen.



Upper floor of the Signal Box being repaired and restored

On the 6th October 2019 the upper floor was transported to Irlam Station where it was carefully lowered and secured onto the re-constructed lower floor, which had been assembled on a new concrete foundation. Whilst further work was still required, the Signal Box immediately looked at home and was an instant reminder of bygone days and Irlam Station's history.



Signal Box upper floor being lowered and secured onto the lower floor re-construction at its new home at Irlam Station

This is the fourth Signal Box to stand tall and proud at Irlam Station. The first was in place in 1873 when the station originally opened. A second one was built slightly west of this when the track was deviated, due to the building of the Manchester Ship Canal, and was opened on June 19th 1892. A third Signal Box was located at the junction between them and all three boxes can be seen on the 1874-1888 Ordnance Survey map. The original Signal Box was closed on the 26th March 1893.

Whilst the Signal Box shell was undergoing restoration all the mechanical components were carefully refurbished and painted. Once the shell was completed, work began on reassembling and installing the original 32 lever frame, a labour-intensive task that required great attention to detail, as well as engineering experience.



Neil McArthur installing the lever frame

Led by Hamilton Davies Trust's Chair and engineer, Neil McArthur, and ably assisted by members of the Friends of Irlam Station (FIRST) volunteers Ian Taylor, Ian Carter and Paul Heslop, the extensive work was finally completed in August 2020.

Irlam Station's original Signal Box was once a very busy workplace, having to deal with stopping and through passenger trains, freight trains and local freight movements in the various sidings around the station. Between 1904 -1926 track layout and goods facilities were expanded considerably to accommodate sidings to local industries such as Royles Engineering Works, Hulmes Match Works, Kinder Wallpaper Works and the Lancashire Steel Works, resulting in 44 levers being required to manage the increase in rail movements. In 1957 a new service line was built to the Steelworks from Glazebrook East Junction, which was controlled by another signal box fitted with 88 levers.

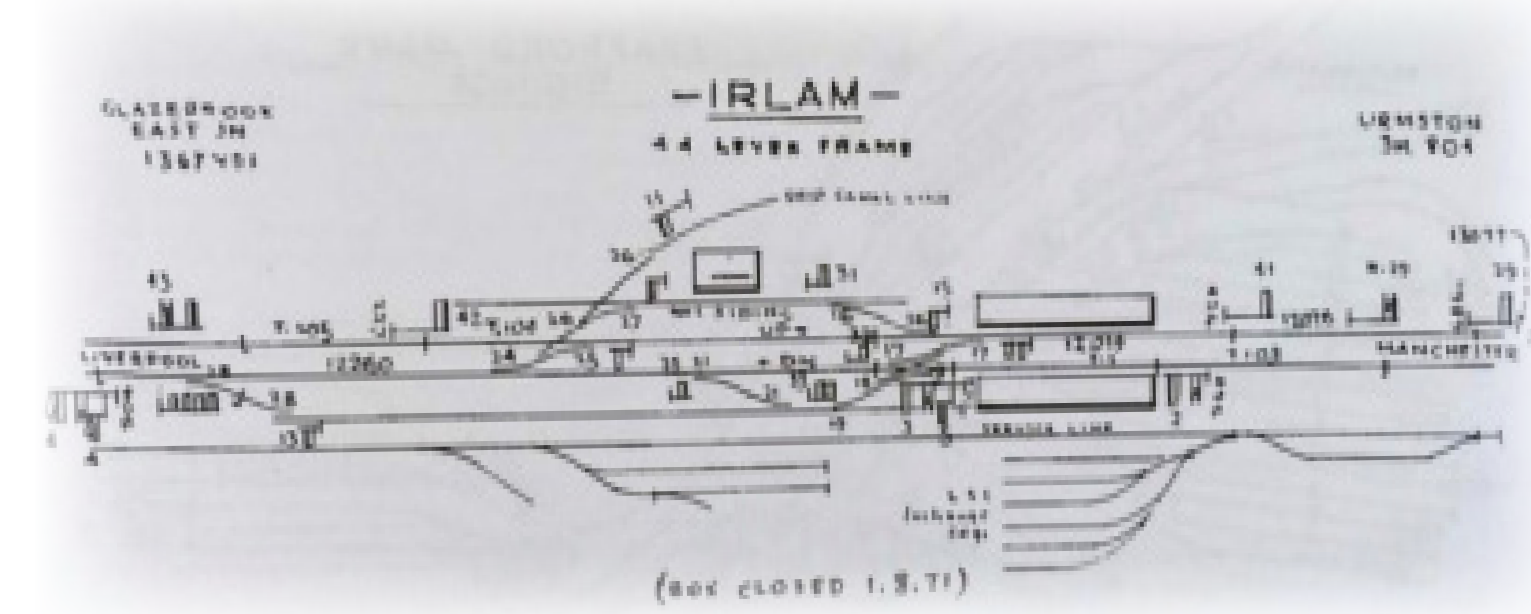


Diagram by John Swift shows track layout around Irlam at its peak in the 1950s when the Signal Box had 44 levers

Signal Boxes are traditionally a two-storey building, with the upper floor glazed on three sides to enable the signalmen to have clear visibility of the tracks and trains in their proximity. The upper floor, known as the operating floor, is where operations are carried out to control a section of track or 'block'. The lower floor, usually called the locking room, contains equipment that connects levers, via various cranks, pulleys, rods, chains and wires, to the signals, points and equipment on the trackside.

The signalman's working day was a very demanding one that required a huge level of responsibility. He controlled the progress of trains with a variety of signals to the driver and altered the route a train took by adjusting the points in the track. A range of instruments helped the signalman to move a train safely by indicating to the driver which part of the track the trains were on, and by confirming signal positions. As electrical instruments and equipment developed, the traditional mechanical safety interlocking, that prevents conflicts between signals and points, was improved in the late 1900s by the introduction of electronic controls.



Snapshot of the upper floor of the Signal Box showing some of the many instruments and artefacts on display inside

Having survived its long journey from Yorkshire and its extensive restoration, the Signal Box finally opened to the public on the 27th August 2020. Along with the adjoining Signal Yard, the Signal Box now forms a magnificent museum and added heritage attraction to Irlam Station.



Visitors are welcome to freely look around the Signal Yard at any time. Accompanied tours of the Signal Box can be arranged via the Station House booking system - please ask a member of staff.