

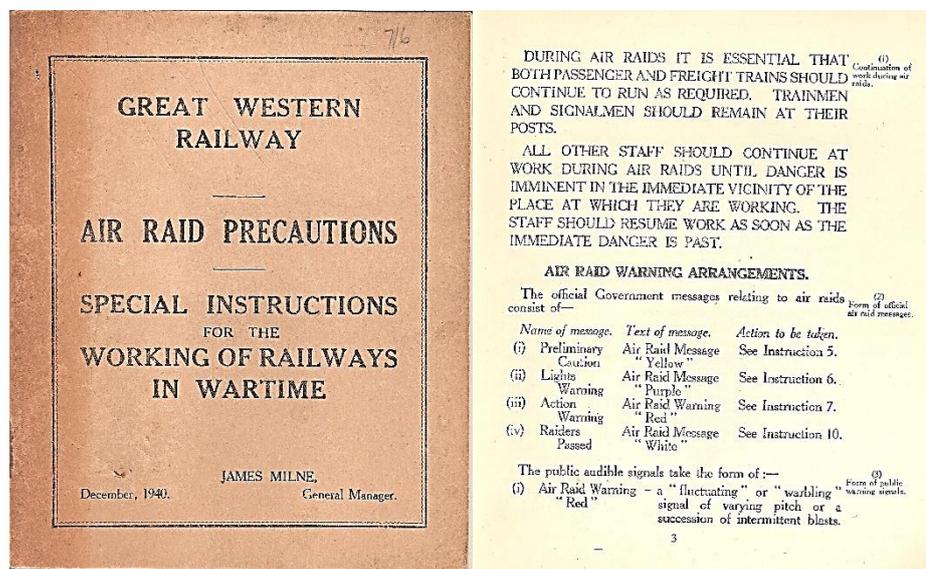
Signalman's ARP Shelter (Tin Coffin)



This Air Raid Precaution (ARP) Signalman's Air-raid shelter was discovered at Tyseley in the Summer of 2022. It is believed to have come to Tyseley with the Great Western Railway Holesmouth Signal Box in 1985. This Signal Box had worked the junction into the Avonmouth (Prince Edward) Docks outside Bristol. These docks were a prime target for the German air-force during WW2 as they handled imported oil and petrol products which were needed for the war effort. Holesmouth Signal Box was rebuilt on the same site after the previous Signal Box was destroyed during an air-raid in April 1941. Rebuilding took a month with only the important frame from the original signal box being salvaged.

The LMSR came up with a design to provide some protection to Signalmen following a fatality to one of their staff in the Midlands during an air-raid in 1939.

Railways provided an essential service during the war and staff were required to remain at their posts even during an air-raid. Signalmen were particularly vulnerable because most Signal Boxes were built with a raise operating floor



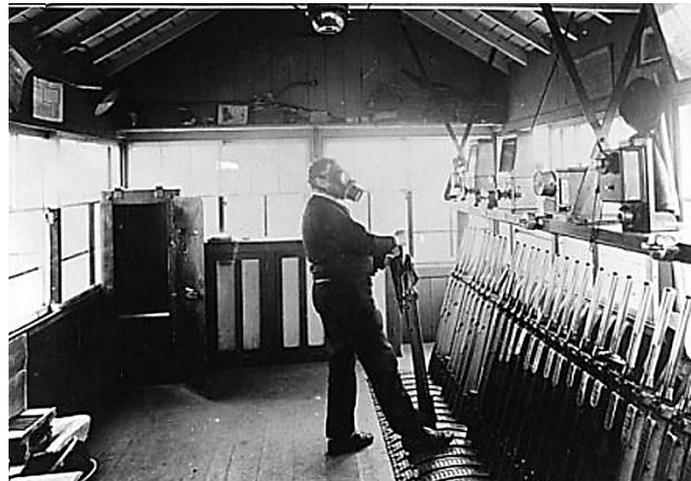
surrounded with windows on at least three sides. This gave the Signaller a good view of the track-work he controlled. The ARP Shelters would not have protected the occupant from a direct hit, but were designed to provide some protection from shards of flying glass. These ARP shelters were nicknamed 'Tin Coffins' by the staff. The shelter was constructed from 1/4inch steel plate with a steel plate door on two hinges. On each side narrow slots were cut through at eye level to provide some visibility. The interior of the shelter measured five foot tall by two foot square and had a wooden seat positioned 1' 6" above the floor.

LMSR publicity photograph showing a Signaller seated in an ARP shelter. The photograph is date stamped 16th October 1939, just six weeks after the start of the war.



Information gleaned so far indicates that 5,582 of these ARP Shelters were manufactured. This quantity may be just of the LMSR design, but it appears that the LMSR design was shared with the other British Railway Companies. Some like the LNER set about designing their own style of conical shelter, while it appears that the GWR largely copied the LMSR design. One difference between these two designs was that the LMSR design had no steel floor, while the GWR design did. The use of 1/4inch boiler plate meant that the shelter could not be made at the GWR's Signal Works at Reading, but was fabricated in A Shop at the GWR's Swindon Locomotive Works.

An early wartime GWR publicity photograph showing a Signaller wearing a Gas mask while undertaking his operations. An ARP Shelter can be seen in the corner of the signalbox.



The Signaller's ARP Shelter at Tyseley has been painted by volunteers to help preserve it and a replacement seat will be installed. When first located the shelter's door was missing, but this was found in September and has now been reattached. No serial numbers or other markings have been discovered so far.

Robert Ferris

Volunteer Archivist (October 2022)

