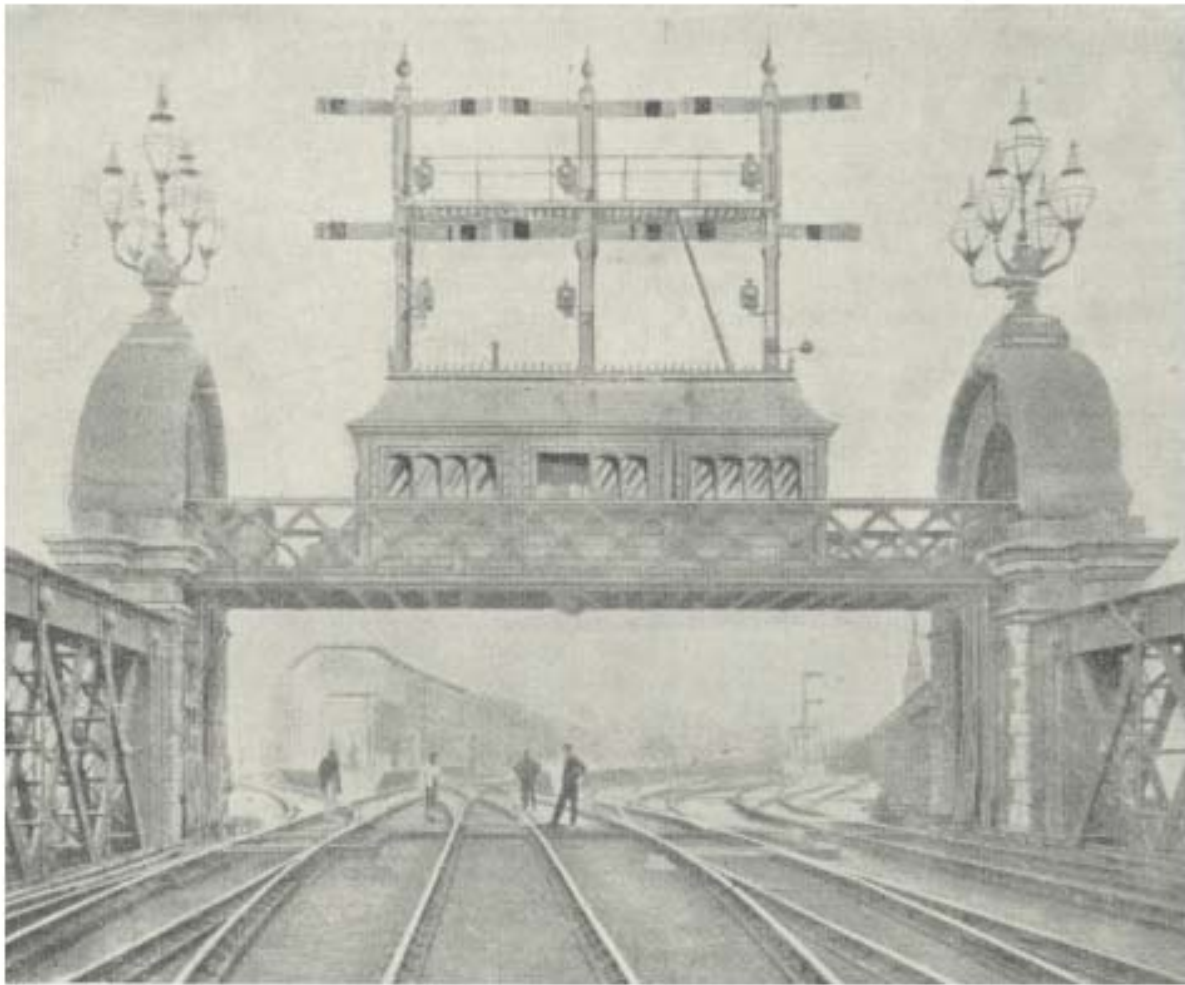


Early Signals at Charing Cross



The original signals at Charing Cross Station, South Eastern Railway, supplied by Saxby & Farmer in 1864

THE first signal box at the Charing Cross terminus of the South Eastern Railway was erected by the long well-known firm of Saxby & Farmer for the opening of the station on January 11, 1864. It remained in use until 1888. The locking frame was of the type produced by the makers in 1860, and used by them until the introduction of the so-called "rocker" type of frame with "grid" locking mechanism, a type which became very popular, not only in Great Britain, but in several Continental countries, where it may still be seen.

The incoming and outgoing signals were grouped, in accordance with a practice which prevailed for some years, on the top of the signal box, and were worked by simple direct rod connections. The coloured glasses were inside the signal lamps, on the principle of the guard's tri-colour hand lamp, and were

rotated by a crank connection taken from the up-and-down rods. This practice was given up fairly early on the S.E.R., but was continued for some 30 years on the L.B.S.C.R., where Saxby & Farmer, by agreement, continued to carry out the whole of the signalling work for a long period. The semaphore arms had a black stripe on both faces, and on the L.B.S.C.R., this custom also continued for many years, but the S.E.R. soon adopted the plan of painting a white ball, not a stripe, on the red face, retaining a black stripe on the white one. The arms were not counterbalanced in themselves at that time, and would fall from the danger position if a down rod broke.

This method of mounting the signals above the box, instead of placing them at the actual fouling points, which can be seen in many pictures of old railway

junctions and termini, was very convenient from the mechanical point of view, as there were no wire runs, and their various connections, to instal and maintain, but it possessed two great disadvantages. One was that, if the signal was against them the drivers had to be relied upon to stop, or remain, clear of the fouling point, in the case of converging movements. They could not run right up to the signal, as they can now. The second was that, in foggy weather, the signals would almost certainly be invisible from the point where a train would have to wait if "danger" was shown, and this made it necessary, at such times, for groundmen to convey messages to the drivers.

The system originated from the fact that the signals were regarded as a form of the old visual telegraph, from which they were in fact derived, and were

simply the means of conveying a message or instruction. They did not necessarily stand at the spot where they became effective. That had to be known, and taken account of, by the driver, on the basis of his knowledge of the layout at the station or junction. Sometimes the number of signal arms grouped in this way became quite considerable. At Charing Cross, four additional arms were later placed over the central set, and this greatly increased the height of the post.

The companion signal box at the Cannon Street terminus had four tall posts above it carrying no fewer than 26 arms. The reading of all signals so arranged was by no means an easy matter for the drivers, especially at night. In foggy weather, it was scarcely possible to see the lights, particularly those at the tops of the posts, even from a short distance.