

UNDERGROUND ITEMS FROM THE TELEVISION AN OCCASIONAL SERIES

by Paul Creswell

**“THE TUBE: GOING UNDERGROUND” – CHANNEL 5 – 21.00 TO 22.00
BROADCAST ON CONSECUTIVE MONDAYS
FROM 21 MARCH 2016 TO 9 MAY 2016**

There were a total of eight programmes in this series. By agreement between the editor and your reviewer, the full review was thought to be too large for one issue of *Underground News* and it has thus been split into two parts, each one covering four programmes. Thus, this first review covers programmes one to four inclusive (21 March to 11 April inclusive). The review of the final four programmes will hopefully appear in the next issue of *Underground News*.

Where names are quoted, the spelling is as shown on a caption when the person concerned was speaking. In some cases, names were not shown, and your reviewer has offered his ‘best guess’ at the correct spelling, which may, therefore, not be correct. Apologies are offered to any individual whose name has thus been spelt incorrectly.

MONDAY 21 MARCH 2016

This programme was the first of a series of eight, to be shown weekly. In this first programme, the current problems facing the Piccadilly Line were featured. These included the operational problems that can arise daily, the shortage of stock (due in part to its age) and also the recent ‘stand on both sides of the escalator’ experiment at Holborn station. Football traffic on the Victoria Line was also included, as were the problems for Bank/Monument station when a strike shut the Docklands Light Railway.

PICCADILLY LINE

After the ‘introductory’ section, we were taken to Earl’s Court Control Room (District and Piccadilly lines) and met Piccadilly Line controller Charlotte, an ex-station assistant and driver. A train had halted at Finsbury Park and Charlotte talked to the Train Operator on the radio system. He claimed that there was a train ahead of him, but Charlotte can see, from the diagram in the Control Room that this is not, in fact, the case. She explains that sometimes a driver’s mind either goes blank, or concentrates on something else and a minute or two are thus sometimes ‘lost’. She now has to ‘regulate’ the trains in rear of the delayed one, so as to ‘even out’ the service. Trains are, by now, ‘backed up’ to Arnos Grove, five stations away¹.

We travelled, for a while, with Train Operator Keith, who seemed to have spent his working life in tunnels, having been a miner in Whitehaven, Cumbria, before moving to London. He pointed out that, though sat at a ‘desk’, his office had ever changing views, unlike the more standard office!

Returning to the Control Room, Charlotte told us that, on this shift, some 16 trains on the line were out of service. One Train Operator reports that his train has wheel flats and we saw a Mobile Train Technician, Gary Corrigan, attend this train, clearly from Acton Town station. This required the train to be returned to depot.

Gary explained that flats can lead to a noisy and uncomfortable ride and can even be dangerous. They can be caused by leaves which make the wheels skid along the rails when trains are braking. We then visited a depot (not clear to your reviewer whether this was Cockfosters or Northfields, but probably the latter). If the flats are not too bad, the train can pass over a wheel lathe to return the wheels to a true (round) profile. If they are more serious, the bogie is removed for the wheels to be changed and we were shown this.

Train Maintainer Tony told us that the stock is old, but ‘with age comes simplicity’. Because of the number of problems with flats, the depot is struggling to meet the ‘minimum requirement’ for stock and is working round the clock to achieve this.

¹ One would have thought that, in the event of a hold-up in the service, it was the trains ahead (in front) of the problem that would need to be regulated, otherwise the gap in front of the incident train would get wider and wider. *Basic principles of ‘controlling’*. Ed.

Gary Corrigan also related that, as the Piccadilly Line stock and associated equipment is quite old, searches have, it seems, even been made on eBay for spare parts for the platform train describers!

In the next decade, new trains are due on the Piccadilly Line, as part of a ten million pound² upgrade, though we left in the dark as to whether that figure applied just to the Piccadilly Line or the whole network. Your reviewer assumed the former, as ten million pounds would not go far across the whole network!

BANK/MONUMENT

At the Bank/Monument complex, with some ten platforms to control, we were told that the station handles some two million passengers a week.

There was a two-day strike on the Docklands Light Railway and new recruit Naeem was handed the unenviable task of assisting customers find alternative routes. As an event was taking place at the ExCeL centre, there were numbers of people, many of whom were visitors to the country, trying to get there. Naeem tried to form small groups bound for ExCeL, so he did not have to try to explain to every individual person how to get there by other tube and bus routes!

There was also a train in difficulties on the Waterloo and City Line and we observed the problems involved in persuading people to leave a platform where no train was likely to arrive soon.

HOLBORN

At Holborn, we were present for the commencement of the “please stand on both sides of the escalator” experiment. When implemented, it made virtually no difference, as people continued to do what they had done for decades and walked up the left-hand side. Siddonie (Station Control Room Assistant) was somewhat sceptical that the idea would ever work. “People do not like change” she said! Later that day, Tony, the Station Supervisor, showed us a page from the afternoon’s *Evening Standard* with the headline “We Won’t Stand for This”.

We returned for the third and final week of the experiment, designed to increase the flow of people and thus reduce the ‘blocking back towards the platforms’ that was being experienced at this station. It was now working! The number of people recorded (by hand held counters) leaving the station had increased, so the experiment thus proved a ‘small breakthrough’!

Tony also took viewers on a short tour of the disused passageways and disused platform at Holborn. On one wall, he pointed out a Piccadilly Line map from the days when the line terminated at Hounslow West, long before the later extension to Heathrow Airport.

LONDON BRIDGE

At London Bridge, the diversion of passengers from Bank/Monument (mentioned above) brought crowding problems there. To alleviate the crowds building up, the station supervisor (Peter Taylor) was forced to divert passengers via the street, on a wet morning. We then observed his resultant unpopularity! Peter’s father, grandfather, brother, sister and uncle had all worked on the Underground at one time or another.

INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

The ‘incident response team’ attended an incident at Angel station, where it was reported that four persons had been involved in an accident on the escalator. The two-man team attended to the minor injuries of the man and wife involved. (There was no sign of the other two persons from the original report).

HIGHBURY & ISLINGTON

This is, we were advised, one of three stations that football fans use to gain access to Arsenal football ground. We met Tino Santiago, a member of the ‘Special Requirements Team’ whose personnel are used at such times to provide more staff at extremely busy events, etc. The staff at Highbury & Islington are experts in crowd control and the effects of the stoppage of an escalator were seen. The crowds started ‘backing-up’ from the platforms and, as the situation worsened, the decision was taken to non-stop trains to prevent any further build-up. This appeared to be on the northbound Victoria Line platform, where viewers observed a train non-stopping.

² Should this have been ‘ten billion’ ?

MONDAY 28 MARCH 2016

This programme was the second of a series of eight, being shown weekly. In this programme, the focus was on the stations at Victoria, Waterloo and Greenford and also new uniforms. We also visited the Network Control Centre³, Emergency Response Team and a new Train Operator on the Northern Line.

NEW TRAIN OPERATOR

We visited Lee, a new train operator on the Northern Line, as he changed ends at Edgware. He observed that the Underground was the busiest it had ever been. He later commented that he 'sorts out his life' whilst in his cab. He also told us that he was irritated and alarmed by some passengers who pretended to push their friends in front of trains. Personally, he tries to avoid rush-hour travel (as a passenger).

NETWORK CONTROL CENTRE

We visited the Network Control Centre, which is the 'eyes and ears' of the Underground network. A train had broken down on the Victoria Line at Victoria and, to relieve the overcrowding which would inevitably shortly be a result, the station was closed to incoming passengers. We later observed the station reopen to incoming passengers.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

The emergency response team were sent to Warren Street, where a woman had fainted on a packed train. They administered first aid and summoned an ambulance for further checks on her.

VICTORIA

We visited the Ticket Office in its final days of operation, with five staff working the windows there. One of these, Evelyn (Customer Services Assistant) said that the station's staff were like brothers and sisters; sometimes they loved each other, sometimes not! We also saw how language barriers can cause problems, when intending passengers appear only to speak their mother tongue.

We also watched as Evelyn ejected (verbally) a ticket tout trying to sell used tickets to unsuspecting tourists. (Your reviewer, reflecting on the possible legal situation here, wondered if the 'tout' was really a member of the film crew?). The Ticket Office was to close, as the vast majority of passengers now used contactless methods of payment. Passengers would shortly have to use machines, instead of conversing with Ticket Office staff.

Shaun explained to passengers that today was the final day of the Booking Office. From the next day, he and others (such as Evelyn, above) would be on the concourse, assisting passengers there. Later, they would move to other locations. Victoria handles one third of a million passengers each day.

At almost midnight, Evelyn finished her final shift and closed the Booking Office.

We returned to Victoria to see staff (at night) boarding up the Ticket Office. Station Manager Keith was seen on his way to work, wondering if the queues might build up to the point where he had to allow passengers onto the platforms without paying! For the next ten weeks, only four machines for payment would be available. We heard from one or two disgruntled passengers about the time they had to queue to get to a machine.

We again returned to Victoria, some six weeks after the closure of the Booking Office. Evelyn said that she still preferred the personal touch which the Booking Office had provided.

We returned even later to Victoria, by which time there were some twenty-two machines in service. Evelyn had now been issued with an iPad and, thus 'armed', appeared a little more confident!

WATERLOO

Jaison (Customer Services Assistant) was a native of New York, but his grandfather had lived in Somerset. He had always had a 'feeling' for London and was studying the TfL website one day, seeking

³ The Network Control Centre (NCC) was created following "The Company Plan" in 1992. Prior to that there was a Head Controllers' office at 55 Broadway and (from the birth of the Underground Ticketing System) there was an Operations Command Centre (OCC) at Baker Street. These were combined to become the NCC following the Company Plan and was at 55 Broadway. This became the Network Operations Centre (NOC) in 2005 and then the London Underground Control Centre (LUCC) after the move from 55 Broadway to Palestra.

travel information, when he found some jobs advertised. He applied (for his first job in the United Kingdom) and now here he is! He attempts to create 'his own sunshine' to cheer up the passengers!

We saw Jaison welcomed back after a short break he had been granted, following, he told us, seeing a woman (who had quite probably been consuming drugs or alcohol) step off a Bakerloo Line train and fall in the gap between the platform and the train, losing her life as a result.

We met Phillippa, a 72-year-old Customer Services Assistant, who had previously been a librarian. She showed us her 'secret weapon' – the 'Knowledge' book, which contains useful information on the location of theatres, which main line stations serve which major towns, etc. She told us that she finds Londoners the rudest people, with Americans much politer, even to the point of offering tips! Regular travellers greet her every day.

With lots of changes on the horizon, she had decided the time had come to retire, with some regret it seemed. We returned on her last day and saw the gathering of the staff that she had known for so long say 'cheerio' to her. Regular passengers also stopped to wish her 'all the best for the future'.

GREENFORD

Station Manager Paul had 'had the builders in' for 18 months (at night), constructing something totally novel (for the London Underground) – an 'inclined lift'. Gavin (Construction Supervising Manager) told us that the 40 workers involved have to complete each night's work by 05.00, so the station is available for the first trains to run. They were getting close to the completion deadline.

We later returned to view the official opening of the 'inclined lift', of which, we were advised, there could be more in the future. Imran (Customer Services Assistant) told us this was the most exciting day of his life, then, embarrassingly, remembered the birth of his children and also his marriage. Whoops! A local lady Mayor (of which town we were not advised) took the first ride, accompanied by a lady wheelchair passenger (Sally) who was really appreciative of the new facility. Hardly had the opening taken place when the first defect was seen and heard, with an emergency klaxon blaring out! Station Manager Paul went to investigate and normality was soon resumed.

NEW UNIFORMS

Shaun (see Victoria above), had volunteered to try out a new uniform. This had been designed by Wayne Hemmingway, who had also recently designed new uniforms for McDonald's. We were then introduced to a 'mystery' train, one of many run on the Underground each day (we were advised). Train Operator Adrian took the empty train along the Jubilee Line from Stanmore Sidings to the disused platforms at Charing Cross, where the concourse between the two platforms had been transformed into a fashion show production, with a 'catwalk' and seating for some 40 or 50 observers. The 'mystery' train was the simplest way of getting the equipment needed for the 'transformation' down to the platforms and concourse at Charing Cross. The narrator referred to the platforms concerned as 'secret'! (Your reviewer is sure that many members will recall using them!).

Staff arriving were allocated to a 'changing room' and later 'strutted their stuff' on the improvised catwalk, to the amusement of the invited guests, including Nick Brown, Managing Director of London Underground. Wayne Hemmingway (see above) acted as 'Master of Ceremonies'. Alexis (a Customer Services Assistant) was a trifle nervous at first, but later referred to the event as 'a mini re-birth', uniform-wise. About 20 staff took to the 'catwalk'.

Evelyn (see Victoria above) took the opportunity to have a chat to Nick Brown about the Booking Office closure at Victoria. She would like him to visit the station at a weekend, but was told he lived at Birmingham! Eventually, he agreed that he might 'drop by', one day!

MONDAY 4 APRIL 2016

This programme was the third of a series of eight, being shown weekly. In this programme, the focus was on the stations at Leicester Square, Camden Town and Hainault. We also visited track work at King's Cross St. Pancras, and cleaning staff at the same location.

LEICESTER SQUARE

Ric. and Kingsley (each one of 24 Customer Service Assistants at Leicester Square) related some of the peculiarities of this station. Events started (programme-wise) at about 17.00, with half a million people heading homewards from central London on a Friday evening, an approximate 30 per-cent

increase in the last decade. On Friday and Saturday evenings, the peak hour was later replaced by a huge influx of 'party-goers' and, later still, by their return homewards. Kingsley told us that, in the space of a few minutes, passenger numbers could double, treble, or even quadruple.

This is, on Fridays and Saturdays after 21.00, the busiest station on the Underground system. This Saturday, it will be Hallowe'en. (As the series was recently made, this points to Saturday 31 October 2015).

By 21.00, the station is beginning to get overcrowded and Paul (in the station control room) is considering putting in 'crowd control'. Later, at 23.00, the Customer Service Assistants 'have their work cut out', dealing with an estimated thousand passengers every five minutes. Now, there is a 'gap' on the Piccadilly Line service and Paul instructs his staff to try to get as many people as they can to board the next train, ahead of the 'gap'. He also institutes 'crowd control' by reducing the number of entry gates from five to two, it being more important to avoid crowding on the platforms (possibly dangerous) than in the top circulating area. The delayed train arrives and the pressure is then off.

Later, we returned for the departure of the last trains and the camera operator caught glimpses of various 'idiot' behaviour. Abuse was offered by some passengers to the staff. This Friday was tough, but Saturday was expected to be even more challenging.

Our next visit was on Saturday and we were advised to expect an even wilder crowd tonight! Now we saw 'partygoers' in fancy dress, for Hallowe'en. A one-way system was introduced for entrance and exit from the station, which clearly took quite some 'enforcing' by the Customer Service Assistants. Later, the 'partygoers' returned and some were too drunk to even know where they wanted to get to! Ric. observed that most were 'tipsy' and some were 'hammered'. There was even more abuse for the staff and being poked, punched and spat at were not uncommon events.

Using an enquiry point, a female passenger reported, to the control room, 'wee' on one of the platforms. It was now close to 01.00 hours and, as the last trains departed, Jason (Station Supervisor) commented that the staff were always glad when Saturday's shift was over!

TRACK WORK AT KING'S CROSS (SSR)

Pete (Delivery Manager) told viewers that four or five jobs were often going on at once. Phil (Site Manager) said that track replacement entailed: Cutting up the old track, removing it (as scrap), excavating spoil, replacing ballast, replacing sleepers and then rails. Finally, the new track was tamped to get a final 'line and level'.

Hassina (Delivery Engineer) said that if you rode the track on Friday and again on Monday, you would not be able to tell the difference. Pete added that they were working to tight deadlines, with the important item being not to over-run time, preventing the railway being handed back on Monday morning for passenger use. (The engineers involved were working from Friday night to Monday morning).

We returned later to see an unusual problem encountered. It seems that wartime bomb damage had meant that repairs carried out at that time involved putting cross beams under the track at about 4½-metre intervals. As this was an unknown factor, no allowance had been made for it in the work schedules for the job. Hassina said that obstacles were not unusual, but not usually in the quantity found here.

The beams mentioned meant that ballast removal was much slower than it might have been, impacting on the time needed for the overall work. About one and a half hours were lost. Luckily, there was an overall two-hour 'contingency' in the schedule anyway. Some time was also recovered elsewhere in the work.

Then came another problem. Sub-contractors had turned off the lights available, which could have meant serious problems for continuing the work. Stuart (Construction Manager) said that such 'miscommunications' happened. If the sub-contractor had left site, matters could be very difficult. (Nothing more was heard about this aspect, so we have to presume either that the lights were quickly restored, or that this 'incident' was 'generated' to add to viewing interest!).

By about 05.00, Stuart was performing his last task – watching the first train successfully pass through the re-railed section.

CAMDEN TOWN

Ursoy (Customer Services Assistant) told us that there were many clubs, etc., close to Camden Town station. Passengers generally were in 'good spirits' in the early evening, when arriving for their entertainment. Later, the effects of drink were more noticeable. A man was in some sort of trouble at the bottom of an escalator and Ursoy went to help him. "I'm drunk" he was told, so enquired where the man wanted to go. "Dagenham" was the answer, so Ursoy guided him to the correct platform (how said man later negotiated the change of trains needed, we were not told!). Another man was sick over his mobile phone. Ursoy told us that abuse was not unusual (see also 'Leicester Square' above).

Then a woman was reported on the floor by another escalator. Ursoy speeded to the reported position and found a woman, indeed on the floor. Passers-by said she had just collapsed, and then a passing doctor offered assistance. A little later, she was able to get to her feet and leave the station. Ursoy gratefully arranged for the summoned ambulance to be cancelled.

Later, Ursoy had to deal with a litter bag containing some vomit, for which he thus arranged a replacement.

HAINAULT

At around 23.30, Train Operator Diraj (with some 30 years based here) was checking his train, which had reached the end of its final journey and was about to enter the depot. He needed to encourage one female passenger to detrain, who then promptly boarded the train opposite. He then had to point out that there were no more trains back to London that evening.

Adrian (Station Supervisor) also checked the incoming (and hence stabling) trains for oversleeping passengers which, he said, were a particular problem on Friday and Saturday evenings. He advised them that there were both night buses and mini-cabs available. Although he could send people to the station's mini-cab office, they then, when asked for an address/postcode, could often only say 'home' which was of no help!

By now, it was early Sunday morning and Adrian met the last train to arrive. He has to watch carefully the reaction of sleeping passengers, being particularly alert to 'big guys'. He tries to walk behind them and watch for the clenched fist! Not long ago, he was punched in the stomach by one male passenger that he was obliged to rouse from his slumbers.

CLEANERS

The programme joined Lubo, who hailed from Bulgaria. He had come to London at Christmas 2007 and had stayed on 'to improve his English'. Some of his team were also Bulgarian, others being from Ghana and Nigeria. They were giving what was termed a 'spring clean' to the Piccadilly Line platforms. Lubo had no idea when (or if?) he might return to Bulgaria.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE UNIT

We joined Richie and police officer Rob as they were sent to a station in North London, where staff had reported passengers fleeing from a train, where, it would seem, a man had been behaving 'strangely'. He was quickly identified (just outside the station concerned, it would seem) and Rob spoke to him, whilst Richie found out what the station staff had to say about the incident.

The man totally denied causing any problem and demanded witnesses be produced, which they were not. He was allowed to proceed on his way, after being told that the neighbourhood police would be informed of the incident. Your reviewer paused to reflect on the fact that the team got to the station concerned before the man had walked any distance, making him wonder if the incident was especially 'staged' for the cameras?

MONDAY 11 APRIL 2016

This programme was the fourth of a series of eight, being shown weekly. In this programme, the focus was on the stations at Bank/Monument, Oxford Circus, Kentish Town and Finchley Road. We also visited the Customer Service Centre, Network Control Centre⁴, Incident Response Team, Emergency Response Team and the Lost Property Office. A female driver on the Piccadilly Line also gave us some thoughts on the travelling public!

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

⁴ Now the London Underground Control Centre. See footnote on page 457.

We met Tunday (Customer Service Agent) who told viewers that people like to feel that they can have a good moan, though this sometimes involved shouting at himself and his colleagues. However, he enjoys the job and always lets people rant away! We were advised that, by ten o'clock in the morning, some eight-hundred calls had been made to the centre.

TRAIN OPERATOR

Driver Jo came from Dublin 18 years ago and works on the Piccadilly Line. She told us that she sees the good and the bad in people and that London seems to be full of lunatics! She has had passengers 'up to no good' in the carriage behind her and has been forced to persuade them to leave the train. She has also witnessed an individual 'taking a dump' on the platform, as her train was approaching. She advised us that current thinking (both by passengers and staff, it would seem) was that 'every minute, indeed every second counts'.

Later (Thursday evening), Jo had now travelled some five hundred miles and carried over six thousand passengers. [Your reviewer, whilst accepting the mileage quoted, wondered about the number of passengers. At four days (it being Thursday evening), that gives only about fifteen hundred passengers a day, which, even on only an assumed six-hour shift, equates to just 250 an hour, about the time taken from Cockfosters to the western terminals of the Piccadilly Line. It seems a bit low! (But maybe Jo had had a couple of rest days that week!)]. She sings to herself as she drives along, with one or two rather rude ditties included! She expects one day to have an irate passenger banging on her door! She feels that 'everyone from everywhere' has come to London (presumably including herself from Dublin?). There are all cultures, ages and races. She has seen so much incredulity in her driving that she finds she gets immune to the strange antics that folks get up to as she travels along! However, she loves her job!

We were given a view of Jo (assumedly it was her?) passing through Ravenscourt Park on the District Line tracks, reason not explained! (Your reviewer assumes that those doing the film's editing had zero knowledge of the Underground!).

BANK/MONUMENT

Customer Service Assistants Eamon and Ian told viewers how they tried to make the difficult route to the Northern Line a little simpler for people by telling them to use the 'curly-wurly' (the spiral staircase) and the 'yellow brick road' (Central Line platform).

A woman had dropped her Oyster card on the Central Line track. Paul (Station Supervisor) in the station control room said that women often seemed to drop their 'sling' (shoulder) bags on to the track as they dashed for a train. He now has to arrange to halt trains, so that the Oyster card can be retrieved. Train 13 was held just inside the platform and the driver went to hand his key to Eamon, which thus ensured that the train could not move whilst Eamon was on the track. In doing so, the driver managed to drop his key on to the track, which meant that it had to be retrieved before the Oyster card could also be retrieved and then returned to its owner!

Later, it was now Thursday evening, a traditional 'party night' for city workers. Eamon and Ian were on the late shift and we were told that many of those 'partying' started making their way homewards very much the 'worse for wear'. They wondered how fit such persons were for work on the Friday morning. At the end of Eamon's and Ian's shift, a man, still sitting on the platform seat at Monument as the last Westbound District Line train was about to depart, was encouraged (slightly physically!) to get on said train! One of the last passengers, presumably a little 'tipsy' wished to drop his trousers for the camera, but was discouraged by his (assumedly) girlfriend. A woman waiting on a District Line platform was advised that the last train had left and that she should find a taxi. Finally, the stations were devoid of all passengers and could be closed for the night.

NETWORK CONTROL CENTRE (LONDON UNDERGROUND CONTROL CENTRE)

Here, a delay of anything more than two minutes is 'flagged up' for the attention of the staff. Regarding the Cannon Street incident (see 'Incident Response Team and Emergency Response Team' below), staff had to stay focused on the 'impact' that this might cause, with the peak hour now building up. It might become necessary to 'non-stop' trains in the worst case scenario.

INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

Mark and Richie were called to an incident at Cannon Street, where a man had fallen backwards and been hurt. The team were a 'mobile Swiss Army' we were (light heartedly) advised. They attend about 20 medical emergencies each week. On arrival, they found the man conscious and alert. In order for

the summoned London Ambulance Service staff to attend to him, the passenger flow had to be 'regulated', with the assistance of British Transport Police. The wounded passenger left the station with a large bump clearly visible on the back of his head.

Later, the team were called to attend Bank station, where a woman had collapsed on the travolator. When they got there, Station Supervisor Lucy was with the woman. Mark sympathises with people who want to go partying, as he had done it himself in the past. The woman was not badly hurt and was left to the attentions of the London Ambulance Service when they arrived. It was now time to grab a quick 'cuppa' before there was another call on the team.

Even later, Mark and Richie had to change their regular van for another vehicle, due to a broken headlight. They were then called to Finchley Road (northbound Jubilee Line) where a passenger on a train was suffering from an epileptic fit. This was starting to block the whole northbound service on that line. To get the trains running, they needed to remove him from the train concerned as soon as reasonably possible. This they did, gently of course. Once they had placed him on a platform seat, the service could re-commence. Mark gets aggravated about two things in particular – people with their feet on the seats and those who stop and stare at anything unusual. The latter were in great abundance at Finchley Road. Mark encouraged them to 'keep moving', pointing out that they, put in the same position, would not wish to have passers-by stopping to stare at them. The man was then moved to the platform waiting room whilst Mark and Richie awaited the arrival of the London Ambulance Service.

OXFORD CIRCUS

We were advised that this was the busiest station on the Underground network.

Laura was one of some thirty Customer Service Assistants here. She found that she seemed to develop a different accent (more 'cockney' in nature) when at work at this station!

A woman had hurt her foot whilst using the stairs into the station and was taken into the Station Supervisor's office, where Laura had a look at it. There were no obvious injuries, but the woman was in some distress, so Laura contacted her husband. Later, the husband had arrived and asked about calling a taxi – he was directed to try in the street outside the station. The injured woman was now, effectively, 'walking wounded' and Laura could now return to the gate line. Laura mentioned that, whilst she attended to the anxious woman, it meant that the team in the station concourse were one person short, adding to their workload.

Jerry, another Customer Service Assistant, told us that there was one train each minute here. (With a nominal two-minute service on a total of four platforms, your reviewer reckons that there is nearer to one every thirty seconds, in fact).

Overcrowding led to the decision to close the station (to incoming passengers) and the cameras caught the build-up back into the street. One intending passenger commented that, years back, laws were introduced concerning the transport of cattle and he implied that something similar should now apply to people! After some 20 minutes, the station was reopened, as the crowds that had accumulated in the station had now caught their trains.

LOST PROPERTY OFFICE

A visit was made to the Lost Property Office at Baker Street, where we met 'Glory' the 'Queen of the front desk'. We watched an elderly woman explain about her lost glove, and the check by Glory on her computer terminal, regrettably to no avail.

Viewers were taken 'down below' to the storage area, described as an 'Aladdin's cave'. A total of some 50 staff are employed here and 'Bob' (in charge of the 'warehouse'), described some of the aspects that the job involved. There had been almost 29,000 items received since April (as we had no idea of the date when this was said, the figure, whilst impressive, was also rather meaningless!). Bob mentioned coffins, guns, knives, walking sticks and false legs. He seemed puzzled (perhaps not surprisingly) that you could lose a false leg! Even empty matchboxes and two pence coins had been handed in. He could not imagine anyone paying the £4 recovery fee for those last two items!

Later, Bob told us that sometimes passengers got a bit aggressive, apparently under the misguided impression that the lost property amounted to only a few items, not the thousands that were, in fact, held in the 'warehouse' at Baker Street. A woman enquiring about an item lost many months previously left downhearted after the failure of a search on the computer. She had also left making her claim for too long, as items are disposed of after the three months' statutory period of storage.

KENTISH TOWN

The Incident Response Team attended this station, where the Northern Line had been brought to a halt when there was a report of a man being pushed under a train. He had sustained serious trauma injuries and had been trapped, under the train involved, for 15 minutes.

Jamie of the Emergency Response Unit described working in the confined space under the train to release him, with the assistance of the London Fire Brigade and the London Ambulance Service, the latter stabilising the passenger until he could be released.

Because of the claim that the man was 'pushed' under the train, the police had declared the station a 'crime scene' and it remained closed for several hours. We witnessed intending passengers being quite rude to staff directing them to alternative transport means, though the reason for the station closure was, of course, entirely outside their control. The first priority for the managers involved was, not unnaturally, to open the station as soon as possible.

London Underground implemented a control system similar to that used by the emergency services, involving 'Gold', 'Silver' and 'Bronze' control.

PASSENGERS HAVING ACCIDENTS AND TRYING TO BLAME LONDON UNDERGROUND

We met Duty Reliability Manager Ricky Smith, whose job it is to investigate claims made by passengers against London Underground. He and his team investigate almost 15,000 claims each year, any of which, he told us, could end up in a law suit. He has to ask the questions as to what the passenger was doing, why they did it and how it might be prevented from happening again. It is often the case that stupidity is the basic cause, a problem which seems to relate to many of the system's passengers!

He was alerted to the case of a woman making complaints about getting trapped in the train doors at Green Park. He travelled there and spoke to the Station Supervisor, who gave him access to the video recording equipment. Fortunately for Ricky, the woman was wearing traditional African clothing, so he fairly quickly located her on the recordings. It was then clear that she had attempted to board the train as the doors were closing, so he thus considered that London Underground were not in any way at fault for her mishap.

Ricky was a little intrigued by the risks that people will take (as in this case) when they must be aware that there will be another train within about two minutes. He has even seen people push their children on to a train as the doors were about to close, so leaving the bemused parents on the platform!

To be continued