

# 'DARKEST HOUR'

## Filming the Underground train scene, featuring Oscar winner Gary Oldman as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill

by Niall Devitt

The critically acclaimed film 'Darkest Hour' (Working Title Films, 2017), is based on the events of May to September 1940, and the decision of an isolated and politically vulnerable new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, to muster the will of the British people, and fight on against overwhelming odds against Nazi Germany. A moment, which it can be argued, saved western democracy and civilisation itself. A critical scene in the film is where Churchill, seeking to access the determination of the ordinary people to fight on, embarks on an Underground journey to Westminster. The solid and united defiance of his fellow passengers, spurs the newly emboldened Prime Minister to rally the nation, a 'Finest Hour' in the nation's history.



In reality, Churchill, a descendant of the Duke of Marlborough, would never use the Underground if he could avoid it, though his cabinet colleague, deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, was a regular commuter from his family home, near Stanmore on the then Bakerloo Line. When smoking was allowed, Churchill contemplates the future of the nation with his fellow passengers.

Filming of the critical scene took place over four days in the first week of January 2017 at Leavesden Studios, near Watford Junction, originally the site of the famous Gainsborough Studios. Unfortunately, the originally requested four-car 1938 Tube Stock unit owned by the LT Museum was unavailable as it was still undergoing a protracted overhaul at the Train Modification at Acton, and other LTM cars were unavailable or inappropriate. The film company, becoming increasingly desperate, contacted Mangapps Farm Railway Museum in Essex, to use the ex-Northern Line 1959 Tube Stock 'Heritage Train' red and cream, driving motor 1030. Put on a low loader and rushed to the studio, a convincing 'tube' platform was built, and the car itself given a makeover, with cerulean blue repainted, a false ceiling, with tungsten bulbs constructed, covering over the original fluorescent tubes; and anti-blast netting and period posters fitted, based on originals in the LTM collection.



Though in strict historical terms, far from truly authentic, not least as Churchill is seen travelling to Westminster, and the House of Commons, on a 'deep level car, the 'feel' of the scene is impressive. All seemed to be going well till it was discovered that a critical set of double doors refused to open, despite repeated attempts by the film crew. In desperation, and fearing that if digital technology was the last resort, it would cost at least £20,000 for a few seconds, the director Joe Wright

contacted the London Transport Museum, and I was duly dispatched north to Watford Junction, with a hammer and oilcan.

The cause of the reluctance to budge was found to be detritus left over from years of service on the Northern Line, blocking the door runners. A Hoover, a few bangs, and liberal amounts of oil saved the day, with the doors working perfectly, activated by a small portable compressor. I was also tasked with eliminating any egregious Underground howlers, for example making sure contemporary overhaul plates were covered over. The maps used were an approximation, as sadly no appropriate original for the District and 'Inner' Circle for the period came to light in time, though subsequently an overlooked original example was located on the Q35 trailer at Acton LTM Depot.

British actor Gary Oldman, transformed by incredible prosthetics and makeup, plays the part of Churchill. At the 90th Academy Awards the film earned six nominations, including Best Picture, and won for Best Actor and Best Makeup and Hairstyling. At the 71st British Academy Film Awards it received nine nominations including Best Film and Outstanding British Film.