

EXPANDING THE GAS WORKS – OR NOT

The main source of this article is a letter file, covering the period from 1934, which gives us a rare opportunity to say why things were done and not just what was done.

The Harrow & Stanmore Gas Company opened its premises at South Harrow in 1855. Then coal was transported by canal to Greenford Green and thence to site by horse-drawn carts. This did not last long and coal delivery was via the London & North Western Railway to its goods yard at Harrow¹. In 1880 the Metropolitan Railway opened its goods yard at Harrow² and coal delivery was soon switched there. From these, horse and cart was still used for final delivery to the Gas Works site.

The Metropolitan Railway opened its branch from Harrow to Uxbridge on 4 July 1904 and the District Railway had opened to South Harrow on 28 June 1903. The link from Rayners Lane to South Harrow was also completed in 1904. However, the disagreement that existed between the two railway companies meant that passenger services over the link didn't begin until 1 March 1910. In the meanwhile, the Gas Company asked the Metropolitan Railway to construct a spur off the Up line between Rayners Lane and South Harrow, where the line crosses over Roxeth Green Avenue, and to lay private sidings into the Gas Works. To that end, additional plant was provided on the Gas Works site.

Rail access to the Gas Works at South Harrow was provided from 9 October 1910, just over six months after the opening of District Railway passenger services between South Harrow and Uxbridge, the Gas Works being served by Metropolitan Railway freight trains. With no locomotive run-round facilities at Rayners Lane, the coal trains had to reverse at Rayners Lane and then propelled up to the Gas Works sidings where a ground frame/signalbox³ was provided. The signal box comprised 16 levers of which two were spare and was located on the eastbound side between the two 'run-round' crossovers on the viaduct. New signals were as follows:

- 2 – Gas Works siding Down home repeater, under existing South Harrow Down starter (No.1).
- 3 – Gas Works siding Down home signal.
- 4 – Outlet signal from Gas Works siding.
- 5 – Gas Works siding Down starting signal.
- 6 – Rayners Lane Junction Down distant under No.5.
- 8 – Gas Works siding Up repeater for outer home, under Rayners Lane Up advance starter (No.7).
- 9 – Gas Works siding Up outer home signal.
- 10 – Gas Works siding up inner home signal.
- 11 – Shunt along Up main to clear crossover road points.
- 12 – Shunt Up main to siding.
- 13 – Shunt Down to Up main through north crossover.
- 14 – Shunt Up to own main through south crossover.

Track alterations included (1) a facing connection from the Up main, located 1,325 yards from Rayners Lane Junction and 618 yards from South Harrow DR station, giving access to the Gas Works sidings, (2) a trailing crossover on the Rayners Lane side of the new facing points and (3) another trailing crossover on the Rayners Lane side of that, to enable the engine to run round the train. The signal box was normally switched out and was only switched in when trains ran into and out of Gas Works sidings.

It is believed that the Gas Works spur off Roxeth Viaduct was provided as an afterthought because the original viaduct, completed in 1903, is in brick while the spur is of concrete construction. Moreover, in "Walter Atkinson – builder of the Harrow & Uxbridge Railway" (by Dennis F. Edwards and published by this Society in 1983), there is no mention of the spur in the documentation of the work that had been completed. Because trains had to be propelled from Rayners Lane up to the Gas Works, catch points were provided 50 yards from Rayners Lane Junction on the Up (present eastbound Piccadilly) line to derail any detached and runaway wagons. The maximum number of wagons allowed on each train was 20, which was dictated by the limited space between the crossovers on the viaduct rather than the limited space available within the Gas Works.

¹ Today's Harrow & Wealdstone.

² Today's Harrow-on-the-Hill.

³ Described variously as a 'ground frame' and a 'signal box'.

The Harrow Gas Company was taken over by the Brentford Gas Company in 1924, which was in turn taken over by the Gas Light and Coke Co. in 1926. The Gas Light and Coke Co. formed the majority (90%) of the North Thames Gas Board on nationalisation in 1949.

Harrow Gas Works was provided with a large new MAN type piston gasholder in 1931. Another similar holder was provided at Southall. As they were so large they were used as location objects by aircraft approaching Heathrow and Northolt. After an unfortunate incident when an aircraft landed at the wrong airport, large letters L-N and a pointing arrow were painted on the South Harrow holder and L-HR and arrow on the Southall one. There was some local opposition to the new holder which was placated by painting it in shades of green, fading towards the top. Both holders were for many years pale grey green.

It was the duty of the goods train guard to open the gates at the entrance on the viaduct to the Gas Works. During foggy weather, a Fog Signaller was to be provided at the Up road outer home repeater signal, from 15 minutes before to 15 minutes after when the Gas Works signal box was open.

In 1934 plans were afoot to resignal the Rayners Lane – South Harrow section and to provide a reversing siding at Rayners Lane. We pick up correspondence first dated 22 September 1934 where the Signal Engineer makes amended proposals for the new work. These include –

- The advance starting signal westbound from South Harrow to be controlled from the Gas Works Siding and not to be 'slotted' by South Harrow. This would enable the existing Gas Works Siding westbound home signal to be abolished.
- The advance starter from Rayners Lane eastbound towards South Harrow to be converted to an automatic signal.
- The westbound advance from Rayners Lane to be converted to an automatic signal.

The Operating Manager responded the following month with what can be best described as 'comments'. These included –

- The request for additional signals on the westbound between Gas Works Siding and Rayners Lane, including an inner home at Rayners Lane Junction where one signal would serve both Metropolitan and Piccadilly Line westbound trains.
- The need for the Gas Works Siding area to be made to work automatically, with a 'King' lever and 'A' signs at the appropriate running signals.
- The cost of providing a signalled move from the proposed reversing siding to the westbound platform at Rayners Lane.
- Convert all semaphore signals controlled from South Harrow (District) box to colour light.

At the end of October 1934 the Signal Engineer approved the requirements of the Operating Department in that "The additional signals asked for at Rayners Lane cannot be accommodated on the existing frame and, in view of the possibility of further requirements in the future I have estimated for a new signal cabin and power frame".

The estimated cost for the new work was quoted as £22,700, of which £19,700 was for the new power frame at Rayners Lane and resignalling to South Harrow, the remaining £3,000 being for the additional cost of controlling Gas Works Siding from Rayners Lane. The estimate excluded converting semaphore signals at South Harrow to colour light. However, the new signals between Rayners Lane and South Harrow would be of the two-aspect type.

All this was being discussed before the Metropolitan Railway signalbox in the 'V' of the junction at Rayners Lane was damaged by runaway wagons from a ballast train on 22 November 1934. The signal frame itself was little damaged and the signal box structure was repaired.

The Signal Engineer advised on 9 January 1935 that authority had been obtained for the construction of a new signal cabin at Rayners Lane and for the power operation of the layout there, along with the remote control of Gas Works Siding from the new cabin. It was laid down that the layouts would be operated by two-way route levers in either 'pull' or 'push' mode. The Operating Manager must have been impressed with these proposals because response was swift (on 14 January 1935) with agreement for the scheme.

On 2 February 1935 we learn that the Signal Engineer had reservations about the Gas Works trains being propelled to and from Rayners Lane with the locomotive at the rear in both directions. He

suggested that no train should proceed east from Rayners Lane until all of the track circuits from there to beyond Gas Works Siding were clear, and in the westbound direction until all the tracks to beyond the platform at Rayners Lane were similarly clear.

For the new reversing siding, there was a requirement for a sand drag at the west end of it and catch points at the east end of the siding to stop a train starting up against the outlet signal. It was also noted that the Goods Train reception road was too short, only being able to accommodate 20 wagons. It was deemed that 24 wagon capacity would be sufficient to meet the then current needs without an extra train being scheduled.

The Operating Department of London Transport had concerns about the train throughput with the new signalling and on 19 February 1935 asked that the signalling be revised so that a 1½-minute service could be worked through both platforms and if necessary imposing speed restrictions to achieve that. The Signal Engineer responded on 11 March 1935 by suggesting an additional home signal, P20H^C (see diagram opposite).

On 2 March 1935 the Signal Engineer reported that –

- A signalled move would be provided from the reversing siding to the westbound platform at Rayners Lane (q.v.).
- The signalling would be adequate for a 1½ minute service with 20-second station stops.
- Signal post telephone provided at selected agreed signals.
- Running colour light signals to be of the two-aspect type.

The Operating Department then required –

- The starting signals at Rayners Lane should not encroach on the limited platform length (440ft, with an 8-car Metropolitan Line train at 430ft) in that they should be at least at the extreme ends of the platforms.
- No alterations to be made to the signalling controlled by South Harrow.
- There was dissent about the signals at Rayners Lane being just two aspect but this had to be conceded because of the urgency of the work, on the proviso that they could be converted to 3-aspect at a later date.

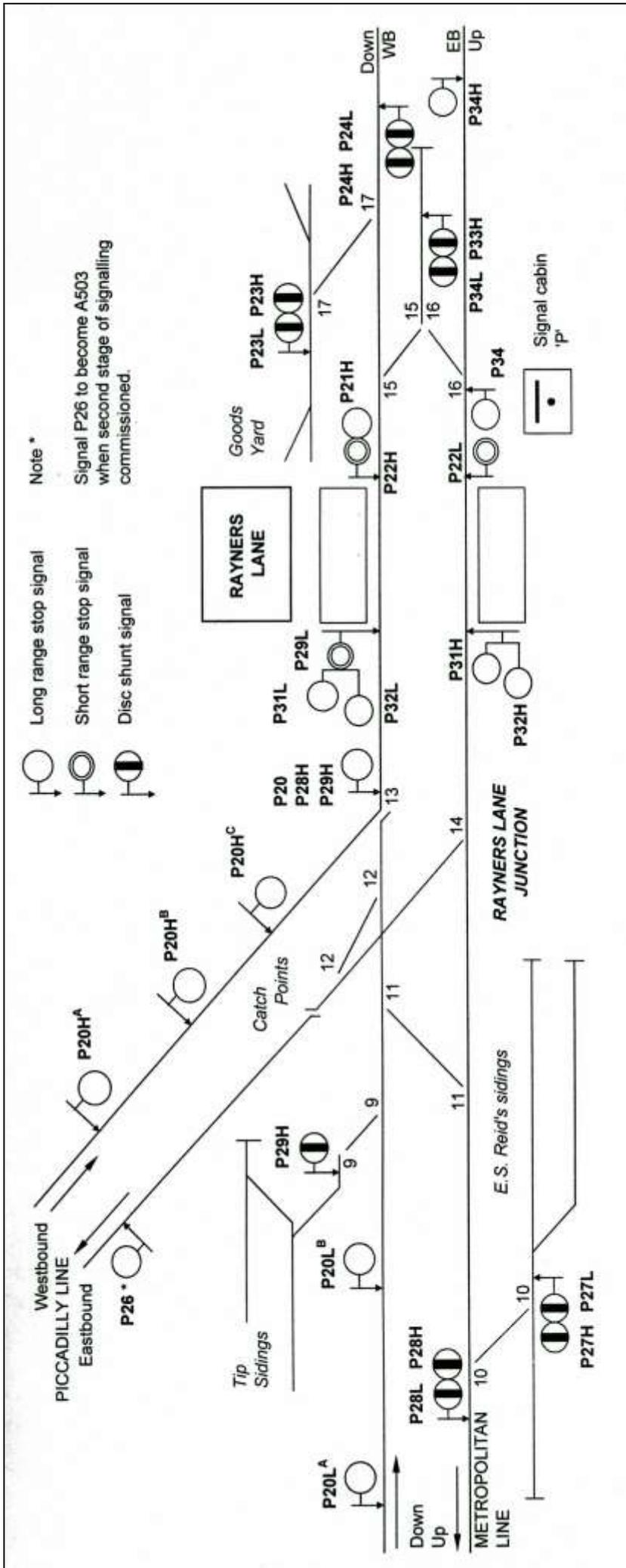
There had been some correspondence regarding the 'clearance' between trains in Rayners Lane siding and passing trains on the running lines in respect of train crews changing ends in the siding. This did not apply to trains which had communicating doors throughout but was considered a problem for some Metropolitan trains that did not. On 4 September 1935 it was noted that the motormen of such Metropolitan trains would have to change ends in the platform and propel the train into the siding.

At the end of September the requirements for the working of trains to and from the Gas Works siding under the new signalling were documented and were:

- Only one train in each direction would be normally be necessary between Rayners Lane and Gas Works Siding but with the provision for a second if needed.
- The maximum number of wagons per train to be 17 and each train to be formed to that maximum.
- The Gas Works Siding train would not run during rush hours and would normally be in traffic hours between 11.00 and 11.30.

In a memorandum dated 8 October 1935 the Ministry of Transport enquired of London Transport whether there were any level crossings between Rayners Lane and Gas Works Siding! Two days later the Chief Signal Engineer replied that there wasn't! Despite the MoT's obvious unfamiliarity with the geography of the route between Rayners Lane and Gas Works Siding, the fact that trains would be propelled with the locomotive at the rear seems to have set off alarm bells ringing with them, especially as 'run round' would be possible for both directions with the new arrangements – previously this wasn't possible anyway. There would be no need for trains to be propelled and to that end it was proposed to abandon that method of working. However, the new signalling had been arranged for propelling in both directions as hitherto and urgent modifications would need to be made for running round (see diagrams page 512).

The new signal cabin at Rayners Lane opened on 20 October 1935 but initially controlled only that area – the Metropolitan Railway signalling at the Gas Works was to remain for a little longer. A diagram (not to scale) of the new signalling at Rayners Lane follows is opposite.



When the original instructions for the new signal cabin at Rayners Lane were issued (Supplement to Traffic Circular No.41 – 1935), it is noted that the arrangements for signalling at the Gas Works siding would be implemented later, at a date to be announced.

However, the Supplement does include a diagram of the new signalling at the Gas Works, along with instructions that would apply at that later date.

It is stated that goods trains would continue to be propelled (in both directions) between Rayners Lane and Harrow Gas Works Sidings. On the journey to the Gas Works the train “must stop as necessary to enable the Guard to open the gates into the sidings”. The guard’s van would then be loose shunted into the occupied siding and the loaded wagons would then be propelled into the unoccupied siding. The engine would then be uncoupled and shunted onto the empty wagons in the other siding without passing signal P1L^B. When the train had been marshalled ready for departure to Rayners Lane the driver was required to depress the foot plunger provided on the left hand side near signal P1L^B. The signalman (at Rayners Lane) would then be able to signal the train out of the Gas Works for it to proceed as far as signal P1H^B / P1L^C.

At that point the engine was to be uncoupled and run round the train via signals P1L^C and P4L, crossover 103, P1L^A signal (where the driver must operate the foot plunger near signal P1L^A and 102 crossover). The train would then be propelled back to Rayners Lane once signal P1H^B had been cleared.

The instructions conclude by saying that the total length of a goods train should not exceed 400ft – engine, 17 wagons and brake van.

So that was the plan

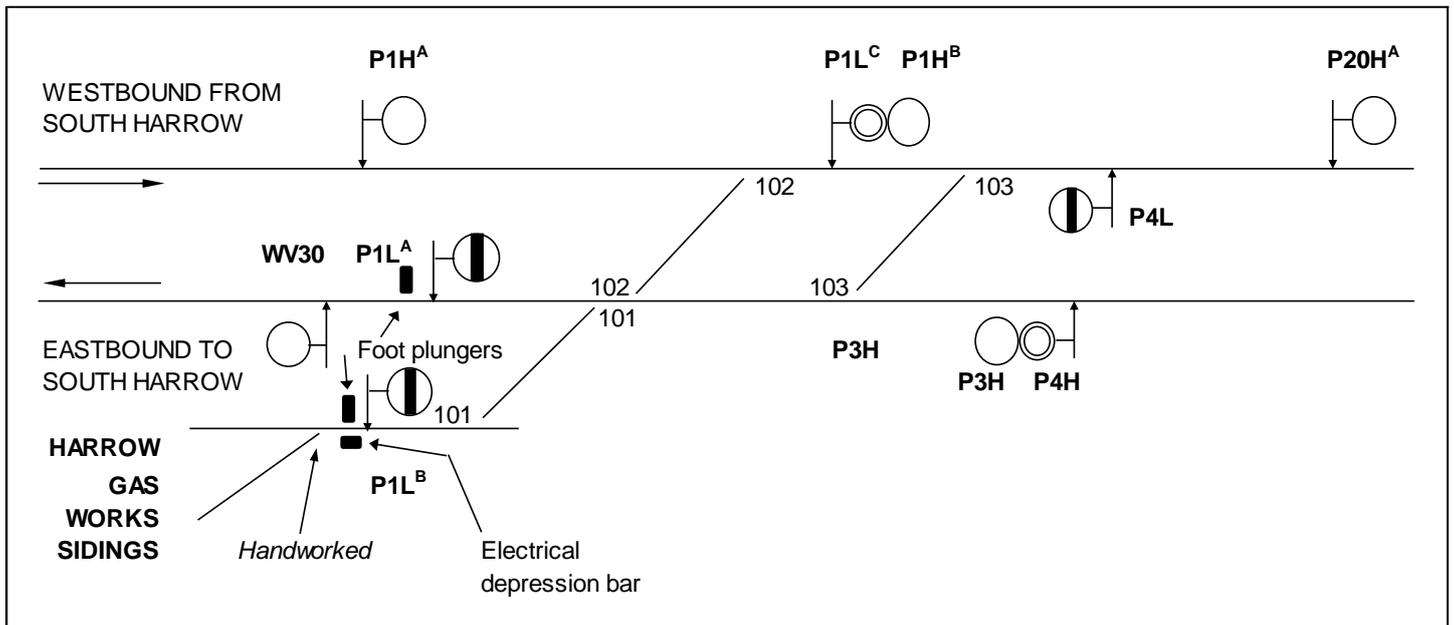
It appears that the propelling of Gas Works trains was still causing a problem and following a flurry of correspondence and a meeting to discuss, the Underground’s General Superintendent reported on 29 October 1935 that –

“.... I am prepared to arrange for the coal trains between Rayners Lane and Harrow Gas Works siding to be hauled in both directions, instead of propelled as at present, from the date on which the new signalling is brought into operation. I have therefore requested our Signal Engineer to make the necessary modifications in the signalling arrangements”.

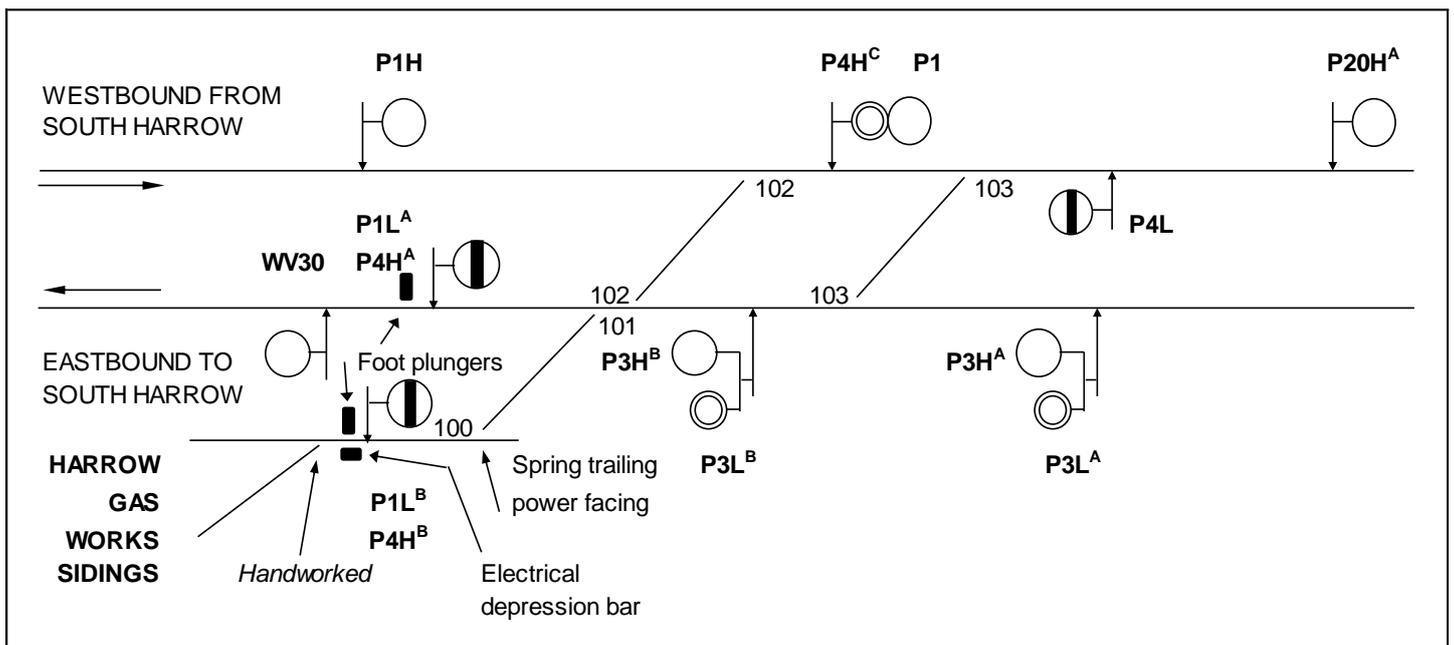
It appeared that the LPTB were flouting the rules and opening the new signal cabin before any approval was received from the MoT for the working of Gas Works trains and therefore subsequently had to modify the procedure (rather quickly!) to meet the MoT requirement. There was a meeting with Col. A.C. Trench to discuss works on 28 October 1935. A letter giving provisional approval of the works, subject to inspection when complete and **no** propelling was dated 30 October 1935.

The new signalling at the Gas Works siding was brought into use on 17 November 1935 and a week later train signalling bells were abolished between South Harrow and Rayners Lane. The revised arrangements were contained in Supplement to Traffic Circular No.45 – 1935 and in this, goods trains were to be hauled in both directions, which began on 18 November 1935. .

ORIGINAL PLAN



MODIFIED LAYOUT



With proper run-round facilities now available at Rayners Lane, a train for the Gas Works would be hauled up rather than propelled. On arrival at signal P3L^B and once cleared, the engine would be uncoupled and run into the Gas Works. Once in the sidings the driver would then operate the foot plunger at signal P1L^B / P4H^B and when cleared the loco will then run to the Down line just west of

signal P4L. When P4L signal is cleared the loco would then proceed to the Up line via 103 crossover and couple to the train. Once signal P3L^B is clear the train would then be propelled into the Gas Works sidings. On completion the driver would then operate the foot plunger at signal P1L^B / P4H^B and when clear proceed to signal P1 / P4H^C back to Rayners Lane. The lengths of goods trains remained at 400ft – engine, 17 wagons and brake van.

The new signalling at Rayners Lane comprised push-pull route setting miniature levers and this was also provided at the Gas Works siding but remotely controlled from Rayners Lane. At the Gas Works Siding site the interlocking was situated in a new building on the Down (westbound) side of the viaduct. Just four push-pull signal levers provided eight routes. As we have seen with the new signalling, trains would be loco-hauled in both directions with the locomotive running round the train at Rayners Lane, which wasn't possible before the provision of the reversing siding. On arrival in the westbound platform at Rayners Lane, the locomotive would uncouple, shunt to the siding (signal P22H), reverse and (signal P34L) run via the eastbound platform onto the Metropolitan Line side of the junction and stop just beyond the entrance to Reid's sidings. From there it would reverse and using signal P28H would then cross over and couple to the opposite end of the train.

We then move on to the Second World War when, on 19 April 1940, a memorandum was sent from the Operating Manager to the Signal Engineer about goods trains working between Rayners Lane and Gas Works siding.

It begins by recalling the MoT requirement to abolish 'propelling' such trains from and to Rayners Lane, which indeed took place in the revised instructions (45/35). However, it is noted that this now causes a problem as several trips a day to and from the Gas Works are now required and it is difficult to fit them in with the increase in the Piccadilly Line service. The Operating Manager then proposed in his memo that he should reinstate propelling but enquired of the signal engineer what alterations to signalling might be required and whether any restriction on the 17 wagon load would be necessary. Propelling would take place from Rayners Lane westbound platform, across to the eastbound Piccadilly Line and then straight into the Gas Works siding. The locomotive would then be detached and later re-attached to haul the train back to Rayners Lane.

The Signal Engineer replied on 7 May 1940 (signed by Robert Dell) reminding the Operating Department that the Ministry of Transport had previously objected to propelling of Gas Works trains. However, the proposal would be possible but "... it would be necessary to hold all the signals and trainstops between Rayners Lane and the Gas Works Siding in the 'off' position until the propelling locomotive had passed them". It is then pointed out that the signalling modifications would apply only to the coal trains and not electric trains, and would involve considerable wiring alterations and the provision of electric train detectors. The cost of such alterations was estimated to be £560.

There is no indication in the files that the work was done, and whether propelling was permitted again or not. Examination of the Traffic Circulars of the period for altered working of trains and signalling alterations, with a negative result, suggest that it wasn't.

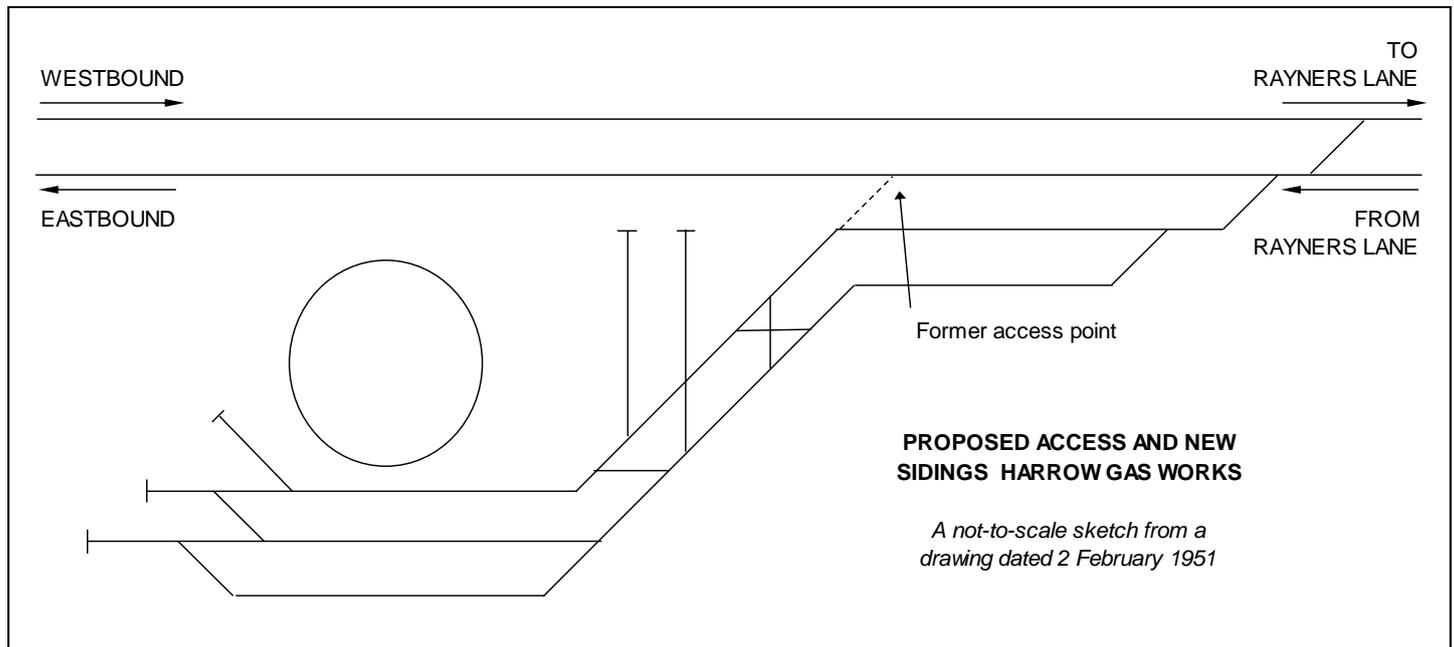
Ten years later on 7 January 1950 the situation with the coal trains working to Harrow Gas Works siding was raised following a derailment in the siding on 1 November 1949 resulting an hour's delay to the Piccadilly Line service. (*Is that all for a derailment?* – Ed.). The Gas Works siding itself was then maintained by the Gas Board and (their) defective permanent way caused the derailment. The result was that London Transport offered to take over the maintenance of 310ft of the private siding, the distance being from the 'main (eastbound) line', at the Gas Board's expense. The private siding was already covered the agreement dated 4 February 1910 which provided that the siding "should be maintained to the satisfaction of the Railway Engineer". However, if London Transport was to take over the maintenance, then the agreement would need to be modified.

On 20 March 1950 it was reported that it was considered 'not the opportune time to negotiate a new agreement with the Gas Board' but that it would be 'better to make a separate agreement for maintenance of part of the siding'. To that end London Transport was to arrange with the Gas Board for the siding to be improved adjacent to the main line "and for a length of 310ft, inside the Gas Works boundary and to be maintained in future by the Executive at the expense of the (Gas) Board". The situation was brought to a head after further derailments and in a memorandum of 21 November 1950 it was noted that there had been seven derailments in the Gas Works siding between 1947 and 1950, as below:

14.05.47	One wagon derailed	In Gas Works siding 6ft short of heel of points entry to Gas Works.
05.07.47	Three wagons derailed	In Gas Works siding over handworked points.
21.09.48	Brake Van derailed	In Gas Works siding where road 'spread'.
18.08.49	One wagon derailed	In Gas Works when departing from siding due to road 'spread'.
01.11.49	Three wagons derailed	One in siding and two on spring points at entrance to sidings.
02.07.50	Engine derailed	Leading wheel of loco derailed when shunting into left hand road where rails were wide to gauge.
18.09.50	Three wagons derailed	On main line at No.102 points.

With each of the derailments thus affecting the Piccadilly Line service, and the fact that a loco running round would also delay the service, it was felt that the cost of a major scheme providing for alterations to enable the engines of Gas Works trains to be run round inside the Gas Works could be justified. The memorandum, from the Superintendent (Traffic) to The Civil Engineer (Maintenance) asks for ideas for an altered layout, along with cost estimates for any suggestions.

In a drawing dated 2 February 1951 it shows the viaduct widened on the eastbound side, west of the entrance to the Gas Works. A single connection would diverge from the eastbound line and run to the south side of the existing viaduct and then open out into two new tracks (one for arrival and one for departure) each with a 600ft berth curving round towards the Gas Works. The existing junction and line would be abolished. Just beyond the 600ft berth would be a scissors crossover and then two short siding roads would join. The tracks would then increase to three with engine run round at the far end. Back on the main Piccadilly Line the two run-round crossovers would be abolished and one installed just west of the new junction, enabling departing trains to crossover onto the westbound Piccadilly Line.



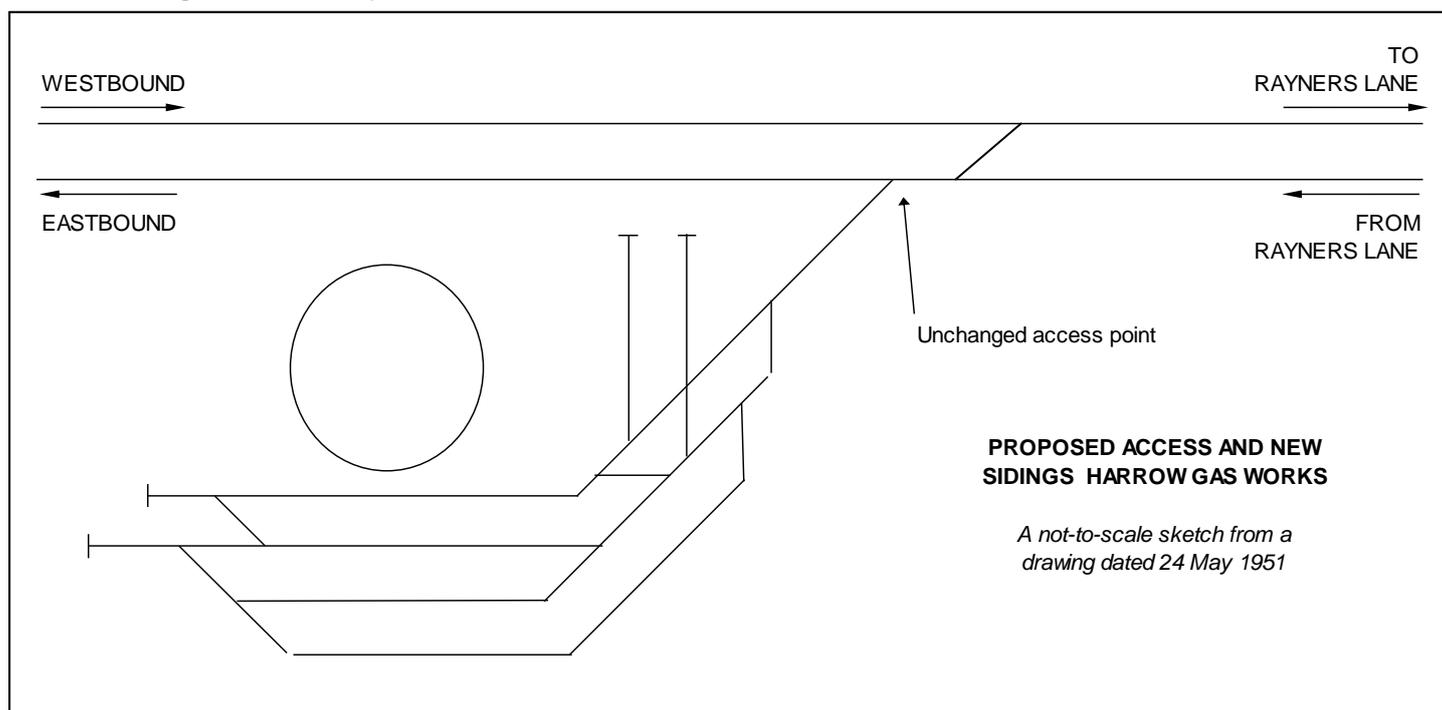
We then note in a memorandum dated 14 February 1951 that "repairs to the existing siding to the Gas Works have already been carried out and it has been arranged for the part of the siding nearest to our line to be maintained by London Transport at the expense of the Gas Board". The Civil Engineer (Maintenance) then goes on to say that the new scheme would require major work in widening the viaduct and one bridge as well as permanent way and signalling alterations. Three days later the enormity of this was realised with the Superintendent (Traffic) Railways writing "It is very unlikely that a scheme of this magnitude could be justified at the present time". On 6 March 1951 a more practical suggestion was made that an additional line might be installed inside the Gas Works to provide a run round facility. Caution is expressed, as the land required appeared to be used for the storage of coke but if the Gas Board would agree to assist, then adequate room could be made available. However, in a memorandum dated 19 March 1951 it was stated that it was apparently not possible to start the additional line at the gates and thus accommodation would be

possible for running round only 15 wagons. The memo ends “this number [of wagons] I understand is useless”.

It was also highlighted that there appeared to be a problem with the operation of the Gas Board’s 30-ton travelling crane within the siding, in that the crane’s “cow catcher” fouled the track in certain places, perhaps causing some damage. The working conditions of the site was also called into question, as a request had been made for the provision of a hut for the Porter Signaller. The condition of the track in the Gas Works was still in question, being raised with the Civil Engineer on 17 May 1951.

Moving on a little, a preliminary meeting was scheduled for Friday 18 May 1951 between London Transport and the Gas Board to examine the possibilities of providing run round facilities for coal trains inside the Gas Works itself. The report of the meeting noted that until a week or so before, the daily coal train comprised the maximum 17 wagons but this had been altered to two trains on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. This, however, presented problems because of the uneven intake of wagons, making it more difficult for the Gas Board to process them. It was revealed that the Eastern Region had made alterations to the number of engines allocated to London Transport work but had not consulted them over the revised plans! London Transport promised to look into this. The method of dealing with the wagons within the Gas Works was then discussed and highlighted the need for an extra siding, capable of accommodating some 20-25 wagons, which would require the reconstruction of the Roxeth Green Road bridge to accommodate it. The Gas Board itself was luke warm to LTs suggestions and stated that they (the Gas Board) would not benefit in any way from the scheme. In short, all they wanted was the continuation “of the daily service of 17-wagons which had existed hitherto”.

Within a week, however, London Transport produced proposals about how improvements to the Gas Works siding could be implemented.



On 9 July 1951 the North Thames Gas Board responded to the plans by stating –

1. They were prepared to grant wayleave to London Transport for the extension shown on the drawing.
2. The cost of any consequential alterations to the Gas Works plant or structural work to be borne by London Transport.
3. They (the Gas Board) would not make any contribution to the cost of the extended siding.
4. The Gas Board would grant all reasonable facilities on site for London Transport to carry out the work but no interruption to gas supplies would be permitted during the construction period.

To support the case for carrying out the work, the General Superintendent (Traffic) Railways requested from the Metropolitan (and Bakerloo) Divisional Superintendent a list of delays to Piccadilly Line traffic between Rayners Lane and South Harrow over a two-month period as a result

of the running the engine around the train on the 'main line' at the Gas Works siding. A list covered the period 4 May to 29 June 1951, on which 25 instances are recorded. Delays varied between 2 and 8 minutes.

On 30 July 1951 the Civil Engineer responded to the memorandum of 17 May regarding the condition of the track in the Gas Works. He reported –

- There was a very small clearance of the safety bars on the Gas Board's 30 ton crane and if there was the slightest variation in the level of the track, then the safety bars would foul the rails.
- The tracks in the Gas Works sidings are maintained "to a good standard" but "the formation is not of high quality and it is obvious, with the amount of give that can take place, that it is possible for the safety bars to touch the rails at any time".
- The onus should not be on London Transport to maintain the sidings to an abnormally high standard, but rather on the Gas Board to modify their crane or otherwise strengthen its springs so as to obviate the need for such small clearances.
- The formation could be strengthened at a cost of £60-70 which might reduce the risk of problems. However, this would require the tracks to be maintained to a high standard.

The report concludes that London Transport would be unwise to accept the liability with no further action unless further discussions ensued.

A legal report dated 1 August 1951 re-iterated that the responsibility for track alterations on the Gas Board's land was clearly covered by the agreement of 4 February 1910 and that the Gas Board was bound to bear the full cost of laying out additional sidings to facilitate shunting on their own land. It also makes reference to the Gas Board's response of 9 July 1951. The total cost of the proposed siding was put at £5,000-10,000, but more likely towards the latter figure. "Direction is now sought as to our pursuing the matter further with the North Thames Gas Board", which would include reminding them of the 4 February 1910 agreement!

On 29 November 1951 another list of delays caused by locos running round coal trains on the 'main' Piccadilly Line was produced. Between 1 October and 23 November 1951 there were 33 recorded delays to passenger trains, again ranging from 2 to 8 minutes. Put into perspective, however, the minutes 'delayed' amounted to 131 but about half of the trips had caused delays to the Piccadilly Line service.

On 7 January 1952 a London Transport report recommended that "it is very desirable for running round the engine of the coal train clear of the main line should be provided. In view, however, of the present economic stringency it would not appear opportune to insist that the North Thames Gas Board should incur the heavy expenditure involved in installing the proposed siding, and it is considered that in the circumstances the present method of working the Gas Works trains must continue".

Six days later it was noted that the Commercial Manager be tasked with negotiating with the Gas Board to either run the coal train during non-traffic hours or to provide the siding, with the cost shared equally to London Transport and the Gas Board.

In the meantime a proposed timetable with two paths for the running of the train in non-traffic hours was prepared:

	Arr	Dep	Arr	Dep	Loco trips between Neasden and Harrow were 'light engine'.
Neasden ER Loco	–	22.20	–	–	
Harrow Yard	22.35	23.27	–	02.43	
Rayners Lane	23.50	00.20	02.58	03.20	
Gas Works	00.28	01.15	03.28	04.25	
Rayners Lane	01.21	01.38	04.32	04.55	
Harrow Yard	01.50	–	05.10	05.30	
Neasden ER Loco	–	–	05.45	–	

Correspondence continued and on 1 March 1952 it was noted that there was no lighting provided in Rayners Lane Yard or Gas Works siding, and if the train was to operate during non-traffic hours, a request might be made for lighting to be provided. An additional member of staff would be required to attend Gas Works Siding, in the form of a Porter Signaller, whose annual wage would be £597.7.1d. All of this appeared to be without any reference to British Railways requirements!

On 21 April 1952, however, the Eastern Region Divisional Operating Superintendent (Western) wrote to London Transport with reservations about the crewing arrangements. He also suggested reverting to propelling the train from Rayners Lane, as in Metropolitan Railway practice. He notes that the gradient is fairly 'heavy' on the upward run and there would be no chance of excessive speed or breaking away.

Miniature colour light signal P3L^A was approach-controlled for Gas Works trains and the approach control was suggested as being discontinued because the heavy gradient precluded high speeds. Apparently the shunter from Rayners Lane Yard was sent to the Gas Works to deal with the train but the Eastern Region people suggested sending a shunter from Harrow, due to the Rayners Lane shunter lacking experience. Finally, engine running round would have to be done in foggy weather. In short the Eastern Region opposed the retiming of the coal train(s).

London Transport appeared to take umbrage to the Eastern Region's comments and on 15 May 1952 stated that there was no way in which 'propelling' would be allowed again and that the signal department wouldn't be willing to alter the control of signal P3L^A. Also refuted was the 'inexperience' of the Rayners Lane Yard shunter and (they – LT) were "certainly not prepared to agree this work should be put on the Harrow shunters" – all they had to do was uncouple and re-couple the steam locomotive at the Gas Works. LT agreed that there was insufficient run-round time which is the reason that they were asking for it to be run in non-traffic hours.

At the end of May 1952 LT prepared a memorandum to be submitted to the North Thames Gas Board for run-round facilities to be provided in Harrow Gas Works sidings, but as a discussion document only. In August LT were anxious to begin negotiations with the Gas Board as "the interference with the Piccadilly Line service is driving us to consider the operation of these trains only during non-traffic hours". Other considerations, such as the provision of additional staff and lighting, previously noted, was now seriously included in the discussion. To that end, London Transport wrote accordingly to the Gas Board and a number of meetings then took place.

On 17 November 1952 a five-part paper (1) described the present freight train working, (2) noted the disadvantages of it, (3) made a proposal for a run-round of up to 21 wagons inside the Gas Works so that a train could run straight in without delaying the Piccadilly Line, (4) lists the additional costs of night-time working and (5) restates the 1910 agreement whereby the Gas Company provided proper accommodation and run round facilities within the Gas Works which would be the responsibility of the Gas Works Company.

At a meeting between LT and the Gas Board on 18 November 1952, it was explained to the Gas Board that they had a legal obligation to pay the cost of any siding work required to enable all shunting movements to be carried out within the confines of the Gas Board sidings. The Gas Board stated that they weren't prepared to spend a substantial amount of money on the sidings and if need be "would cease to take their coal by rail".

As a result of that meeting, on the following day, the London Midland Region's Commercial Manager wrote to London Transport stating their views. It was said that the Gas Board were not prepared to contribute anything at all to the project, and if they were pressed to do so would terminate the agreement altogether and arrange for the future conveyance of the whole of their coal traffic by sea and road.

A further memorandum from the London Midland dated 6 January 1953 summarised the position regarding the Gas Board's threat to terminate the agreement because they have been asked to fulfil one of the terms of the (1910) agreement – i.e. provide proper facilities for working of their traffic. The LMR stated that they (as the LMS) faced a similar position some years previously when the Watford & St. Albans Gas Company successfully carried out an experiment of taking a consignment of 1,000 tons from the Wandsworth Gas Works to Bushey Gas Works by road which worked out cheaper than by rail.

A report dated 12 March 1953 summarised London Transport's position on what appeared to be a stalemate between them and the Gas Board, acknowledging the fact that the Gas Board's threat to withdraw services was very real. Points included –

- The old chestnut of resuming the propelling of trains from Rayners Lane to the Gas Works siding. This removes the run-round problem but introduces a potential derailment hazard at Rayners Lane whilst being propelled and greater consequential service disruption.

- To do nothing and let things continue unchanged, causing some service inconvenience, but with the Gas Board still using rail for coal transfer.
- Offer a compromise scheme with the Gas Board, with the Commission contributing to the cost. However, it is recorded that the Commission's contribution would mostly be very near 100% because of the attitude of the Gas Board.

These last two points were again highlighted in a London Transport report dated 17 March 1953, which also concluded that night time operation was economically impracticable. To terminate the agreement would result in a loss of traffic and revenue to British Railways amounting to £88,000. The report ends with the statement "In all the circumstances there appears to be no alternative but to drop the matter, at least for the time being". In short, London Transport must continue to endure the frequent delays to the Piccadilly Line service if coal is to continue by rail. So, the matter was dropped "for the time being", or so it seems, for there is no more correspondence in the files – until 21 December 1953. A letter from the North Thames Gas Board to London Transport states that the Company would stop gas making at Harrow works on 31 March 1954 with the consequent cessation of coal traffic into the works. It says that no coal will be sent there after 31 March 1954 and during the preceding weeks the quantities of coal will be reduced with the intention of leaving the works so far as practicable without any coal in stock by the end of March. The letter concludes that the future of the site hadn't then been determined but there might be a continued need for siding facilities.

London Transport, on 31 December 1953, made it known that they would prefer to discontinue the service to the sidings altogether. However, if the British Transport Commission could table a commercial proposition to give rail access for any future tenant, then a fresh agreement would need to be negotiated, to provide proper facilities including locomotive run-round on the site.

On 21 January 1954 a memorandum from London Transport to the London Midland and Western Regions state that from 1 April 1954 the Gas Works goods train (known as No.8 Goods) can be cancelled between Harrow Yard and the Gas Works siding. Arrangements would have to be made to clear any empty wagons remaining in the siding after 31 March 1954 (subsequently set for Friday night 2 April) and for the disposal of loaded wagons arriving at Harrow Yard for Harrow Gas Works after that date.

On 26 February it noted that there would be no use for the siding after 31 March and that they would not insist on their right to six months' notice of termination as per the agreement of 4 February 1910 and the supplemental agreement of 23 October 1950. This would apply provided the Gas Board paid for the removal of the junction, sidings and ancillary work on LT property. Also to be removed was the 'shelter' provided for use by staff engaged in shunting operations in the Gas Works sidings in 1951. It goes without saying that London Transport itself welcomed the Gas Board's decision to cease making gas at the Harrow works, if only that the Piccadilly Line service would become more reliable.

And so the Gas Works closed on 31 March 1954 and the points in the area were secured for through running with effect from 4 April 1954. The shunter's 'hut' (also called the 'shelter box') was removed on the last train from the Gas Works sidings and was initially stored in Harrow Yard. Revisions to the Metropolitan Line's Uxbridge branch goods trains working were implemented from Monday 5 April 1954. Effective from 11 April 1954 the pointwork at the gasworks siding was removed and the track 'plain lined'.

A memorandum from the Divisional Superintendent 'A' (Metropolitan and Bakerloo) to the General Superintendent (Traffic) Railways on 7 April 1954 notes that the shunter's hut was stored in the goods shed at Harrow and asks for guidance regarding its disposal. A hand-written note at the foot of the memo states "sent to Northfields" so it is presumed that is where it went. The final stage of work relating to the abolition of the Gas Works sidings was effective from 29 July 1956 when the area was converted to automatic signalling. At some unknown date, the catch points east of Rayners Lane on the eastbound Piccadilly Line were removed and plain track substituted. On the 1935 official diagrams the catch points were noted as being 575ft from the tip of the east end of Rayners Lane Up (eastbound) platform.

Today, the site of the Gas Works is occupied by retail outlets leading onto the Northolt Road and more recently flats have been built just beyond where the line diverged from the eastbound Piccadilly Line. All that remains is the short stub of the viaduct that once led into the Gas Works giving us a reminder of this unusual service and even more unusual method of working.



Above: The Gas Works entry spur, between Rayners Lane and South Harrow, as seen from the front of an eastbound Piccadilly Line train on 26 June 2010. The flats to the left are a more recent addition to the site.

Photo: Brian Hardy

Below: One of the coal trains for South Harrow Gas Works sidings arriving at Rayners Lane from the West Harrow direction, headed (bunker first) by Metropolitan Railway class F 0-6-2T locomotive No.91, which became L50 with London Transport. The train would reverse in the westbound platform and the locomotive would then propel the wagons up to the Gas Works.

Photo: Brian Hardy collection





Above: The remains of the access to the Gas Works sidings which was severed in the 1950s, as seen on 22 July 2013. One wonders if this is the original structure because it looks in remarkably good condition – certainly it has been cleaned up in recent years. On the left are the flats recently built on the site. The area at ground level now appears to be vacated and protected by Heras fencing.

Photo: Brian Hardy



Opposite (Lower): Rayners Lane Junction, believed to be just after resignalling in October 1935, as the signals look exceptionally smart. At far left are E.S. Reid's two sidings and to the right the Up and Down Metropolitan Line to and from Harrow. Just to the left of the signalbox (which was damaged on 22 November 1934) can be seen the points for access to the tip sidings. In the left foreground can be seen the 'slip' points which goods trains would have used when proceeding to South Harrow Gas Works from the westbound platform. On the right is a typical 1930s 'suburban' leisure scene with several people playing tennis.

Photo: Clive Croome collection

Below: Same location but a little to the left, taken in the late-1950s. Reid's and the Tip sidings have gone and the tracks lifted, and the junction 'V' is almost 'empty'. The tennis courts remain, minus tennis players. Unfortunately the gas holder in the previous photo had faded out but this photo shows it at top centre, highlighting the distance that trains had to be propelled pre-1935. The condition of the eastbound Piccadilly Line track to the left of the train suggests that the catch points were removed soon after the closure of the Gas Works.

Photo: Alan A. Jackson



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