

REPORTS OF SOCIETY MEETINGS

UNDERGROUND HERITAGE

by Antony Badsey-Ellis

A report of the LURS meeting at All Souls Club House on 9 October 2012

Next year being the 150th Anniversary of London Underground, Antony introduced this talk by stating that it was based on his new book to be produced to mark this event. The book and this talk were based on items that could still be viewed. As the Underground is continually changing, the book is a 'snapshot' of how things were in 2012.

Throughout the 150 years, there has been continuous development of the railway, the overall time-period can be categorised in a number of broad waves:

- The Victorian cut-and-cover period – involving what is effectively the sub-surface lines of the present system, plus what is now that part of London Overground, which was once the east London Line.
- We then move to the end of the Victorian period – the independent tube lines – viz, the City & South London in 1890, the Waterloo & City in 1898, and the Central London in 1900.
- The Yerkes' Tubes 1907, what are essentially now the Piccadilly, Bakerloo and, northern parts of the Northern Line.
- After an intermediate stage, with only minimal new development, there were the 1920s, with the joining of the Hampstead and C&SL sections and other extensions of the various 'tube' lines (Morden and Edgware, Central to Ealing Broadway).
- After the period of the depression, the 1930s, the loan guarantees, guaranteed by the government at low interest rates, to stimulate employment, meant that the Underground could move forward with extensions such as the northward section of the Piccadilly from the bottle-neck at Finsbury Park to Cockfosters, followed by the 1935-40 New Works Programme, including eastern and western extensions of the Central Line, the northern extensions of the Northern Line, the Bakerloo extension/takeover of the Metropolitan to Stanmore and many station improvements to be carried out around London. As we know, not all of these works were completed (some parts of the Northern Line extensions and the final westward thrust of the Central to Denham). Most of the changes in central London did take place.
- The 1940s saw the finishing off of some of the New Works Programme.
- The 1950s saw little action, despite plans, due to shortage of money, although the extension of Metropolitan Line electrification and track quadrupling was started.
- The back end of the 1950s, into the 1960s saw the authorisation of the Victoria Line, which put a completely new style into London.
- There was then the move into the Jubilee Line era.

The book sees a cut-off date of being 1987, about the time of the King's Cross Fire. The author did consider putting in subsequent items that might not now be seen as 'heritage' but will in the future. Modern design has appeared, which we can't actually say is 'heritage', but will become so, almost certainly.

Antony first reviewed clocks to be viewed on and around the combine. One example was the (now unique) weight-driven clock in a tower, such as the one at Hammersmith (H&C). Staff still have to wind it regularly. However, most clocks of a much more modest size, and Antony gave numerous examples of platform clocks to be seen around the system. Many of these date back many years, often being original, but with variations of types, sometimes because of modifications over the years. He described both the cases and the mechanisms, including the special equipment sometimes installed to regulate the clocks from a central point. The Self-Winding Clock was a common example, widely installed on the Yerkes-owned tube lines and District Railway in the early 1900s. He also mentioned specific examples of what he termed 'themed clocks', such as the one outside Willesden Green in the shape of a Metropolitan Railway 'diamond' motif.

Later examples of standard clocks are those installed on the Central Line extensions of the 1940s and elsewhere, such as at Harrow-on-the-Hill. Many of these were featured on head- and tail-walls of tube platforms.

Antony moved on to modern clocks, including digital varieties. The LED ones seems to have a short life. Antony added: "I really, really hate these digital clocks", this being because they are far more difficult to read from a distance than the older, backlit analogue clocks.

Antony then moved on to Communications Equipment. This section included telephones. Essentially, there are two sorts: The public telephone box, going back to a time when people did not have their own telephone at home (let alone a mobile!) and he showed various telephones at stations for public use and associated signage. In some cases, banks of such 'phones were provided. Originally, these had doors, to aid hearing by reducing background noise, but, with improved equipment and increasing anti-social behaviour, doors were removed from booths and hoods and less complicated items used. Telephone Directories were also provided.

Moving into the beginning of the portable telephone era, when people had to carry large brief-case sized equipment, there were the "Rabbit" telephone 'stations'.

The speaker then moved on to the staff telephone system – the Auto Phone. He gave a number of examples of the boxes provided on stations, so that staff could use the equipment in relative quiet. He gave examples of in-house produced boxes as well as the LT usage of the Gilbert Scott K8. He also showed the various signage used to try and stop the public confusing Auto-Phones from Public ones, such as "PRIVATE" or "LONDON TRANSPORT". A lighter slide showed a mass of bells used for in-house telephones at Hampstead.

Antony moved on to talk about the loudspeaker equipment found on stations, never written about. He described the various kinds around, from what he felt was the earliest type (found at Moor Park and a few Circle Line stations – which he thought should be in a museum!), through the many and varied types that are found around the combine, illustrating many of the examples. He also pointed out that many installations at surface stations included wires stretched along the platforms between lighting poles, as that was easier to install than by digging up the platforms.

The speaker also referred briefly to another item of station 'furniture' – the vending machine. He reminded his audience that one often lost the money and failed to get the goods! He also referred especially to the large Cadbury dispensers, which occasionally overheated, this leading (in part) to their wholesale removal.

Antony's next subject item was tunnel portals. He explained that the different original companies had their variants and that some changed their design over time, possibly for reasons of economy. He showed examples of different types and pointed out the variations, even between those on the different Yerkes tubes. He also showed the recent treatments of some portals, especially on the Piccadilly Line, where a few stations east of King's Cross have the blockwork around the portals painted in alternate green and white.

The speaker sent some time on station name friezes placed on the exterior of station buildings. These were often of very intricate design. Far from being made up from a set of standard letter tiles, they seemed to have been individually made for each location, bearing in mind the combinations of letters, sometimes with interlocking tiles, and dependant on the length of the individual parts of the names and their spacing/locations on walls. Even the ampersands and the glazing were of interest. He pointed out that the effect was not just artistic, but that the railway companies wished to make their stations visible by allowing the public to see the wording clearly.

The subject then turned to the tiling on the walls of stations, including the motifs, such as the pomegranates and acanthus leaves found in the Yerkes station ticket halls. The subject included the words displayed – station names, arrows and direction signage, including a number of very old and even original pieces still to be found. He moved on from the earlier examples to those from the 1930s era of underground extensions, with such stations as St. John's Wood, using the Stabler tiles. One tit-bit was that the red in the glaze of the original tiles at Bethnal Green had been created by adding uranium to the mix!

The subject of escalators was then covered, starting with the last wooden example, the up-to-platform one at Greenford, soon to be joined by an inclined lift (although this will probably be replaced at the same time by a modern escalator). Some escalators still had their bronze sides. Examples featured in the speaker's slides included those with up-lighters.

This led on to the subject of lighting in its varying forms. Some of the 1930 examples could still be found, including some items where modern changes had been effected on the original designs – not

always to improve them! He included some more modern lighting at Gant's Hill, reminding the audience that 'modern' will one day be 'heritage'!

A photograph at Sudbury Town was an odd-man-out – not a clock but a barometer, complete with Johnston lettering.

The speaker noted the care which London Transport invested in their design-work. He also commented positively on the way LUL had sympathetically restored old features, where damaged.

Seating was the subject covered next. Many of the stations now included in the combine were originally built by main line railway companies. Current platform furniture often included original seating, with the ironwork including monograms of the old companies, such as the Great Eastern and Great Western, the latter including the GWR motif and the later 'button' monogram (at Hammersmith station). Hornchurch District Line station has Midland Railway seating, as the Midland owned the LT&SR.

The speaker concluded with a short 'commercial' for the book on which this talk was based and, after fielding a few questions, he was then thanked him on behalf of the audience for a very thorough review.

Eric Stuart