

## 110 YEARS OF THE GREAT NORTHERN & CITY

110 years ago, on 14 February 1904, the short Great Northern & City Railway opened between Finsbury Park and Moorgate with intermediate stations at Drayton Park, Essex Road and Old Street. Highbury opened later, on 28 June 1904, becoming Highbury & Islington on 20 July 1922. Despite aspirations of things much grander (through trains to Moorgate from the Great Northern main line Railway) it remained a relatively quiet backwater, although it did have its moments at peak times with a 2½-minute service of five or six-car trains scheduled – and with skip-stop operation. For the most part, however, two-car trains sufficed at off-peak times. The Metropolitan Railway took over the GN&C in 1913, although the line remained ‘isolated’ until the line was absorbed into British Rail’s Great Northern Electrification scheme in the 1970s. After London Transport was formed in 1933, it became the Northern City Line but in later years (and after the closure of the Finsbury Park – Drayton Park section) became known as the Highbury Branch (of the Northern Line). Of course the line’s history has been told in various publications before, so this will be a short pictorial look at the early days.



**Above:** A line up of GN&C Stock on the stock connection ramp at Drayton Park, comprising mostly the original wooden-bodied stock. However, the fourth car from the camera is one of the all-steel cars. This photo shows the GN&C’s outside current rail system. The brick-built ‘hut’ seen beneath the third car survived until a few years ago. Note the lattice gates on the car corner, provided to prevent passengers falling between cars – inter-car barriers are nothing new!



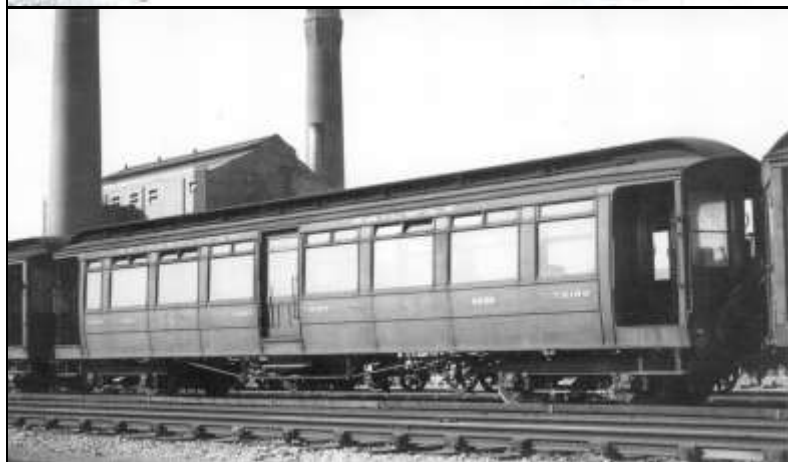
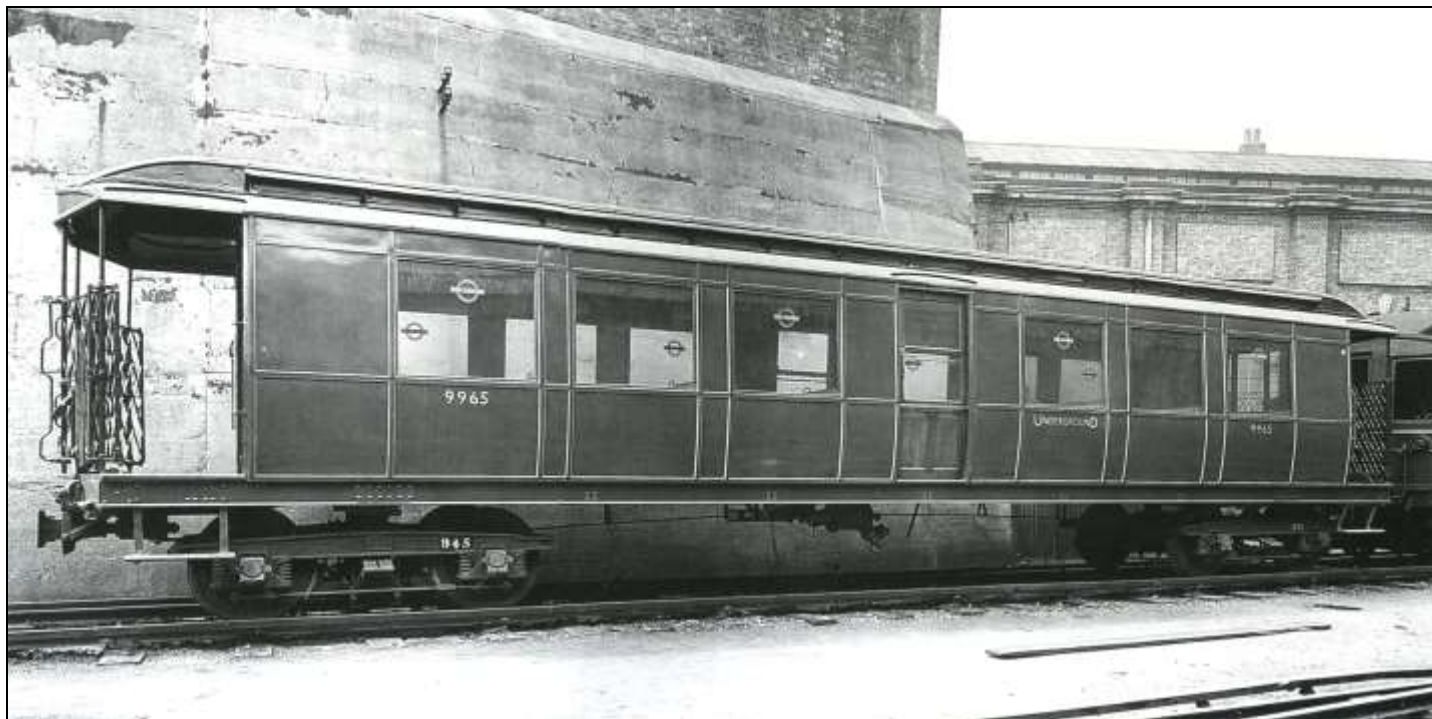
**Left:** The northern terminus of the GN&C was at Finsbury Park, seen here in London Transport days, with what appears to be a paper station name roundel. Again, this is a train of wooden-bodied stock and the photo shows the distinctive 'hump' that all of the Underground platforms at Finsbury Park had, and still have. Finsbury Park was a hive of activity, being a stabling point during off-peak periods with coupling and uncoupling taking place on the peak 'shoulders'.

**Overleaf:** (Top) Finsbury Park, showing one of the all-steel motor cars, of which there were originally five, but a sixth was added in 1907 by the conversion of a steel trailer. Note the train set number '8' in the driving cab window. The ten full-length trains required for rush hour service were numbered 2 to 20 (even numbers only) and trains 2 to 10 (even numbers only) were used for uncoupling, becoming 1 to 9 (odd numbers only), with an 'a' suffix for the two-car service portion and a 'b' for the uncoupled portion. Whether the 'a' and 'b' identification was ever carried, it isn't known.



**Below:** One of the 1906 all-steel third class trailers posing in Drayton Park depot in London Transport days in what appears to be in overhauled condition, having been renumbered in the London Transport series with Johnston lettering and LT no-smoking signs. Trailer 9965 was originally GN&C No.80 but became No.187 under Metropolitan Railway ownership and shows the end gates and centre (handworked) sliding door. To the right can be seen the 'nose' of one of the six Metropolitan Railway motor cars that were transferred to the GN&C from 1930 although they were never renumbered into that line's series.

**Photo: LT Museum**



**Above: (Left)** GN&C wooden-bodied control trailer 6900 in Neasden depot in the shadow of the power house. This car was one of the early GN&C withdrawals in 1937 and was originally No.47 (No.167 by the Metropolitan). The Metropolitan Railway provided first class accommodation on the GN&C from 15 February 1915 but from 8 May 1916 it was abolished outside rush hours. It was withdrawn altogether from 31 March 1934 (the actual withdrawal date was 25 March but existing first class season ticket holders given a few days “grace” to get used to the idea). This gave the opportunity to reduce trains from six to five cars and withdraw surplus stock.

**Above: (Right)** What is thought to be the changeover from the original main line size stock to tube stock in May 1939, judging by the LT standard third and fourth rail in position, the new rail gap indicator to the left of the train and the section switch boxes to the left. The train in the background on the ramp is therefore destined for scrap, as all original GN&C stock remaining that that time was removed over the same weekend. Note the trilby and bowler-hatted gentlemen on the track – Health & Safety, 1939 style (and nobody batted an eyelid!). All of the old stock was removed between Tuesday 9 May and Saturday 13 May 1939 and the GN&C public service suspended from about 15.00 Saturday 13 May until the start of traffic Monday 15 May 1939 to effect the changeover.