

# THE UNDERGROUND AND THE APOSTROPHE

by Antony Badsey-Ellis

London Underground and its predecessor companies seem to have had rather a mixed relationship with the apostrophe over the years, insofar as its usage on their maps is concerned. In part this is due to changes in written style – the apostrophe seems to be one of the pieces of punctuation that gets changed most. This short article isn't intended to be a discourse about grammar though, but more a record of the changes over the years in station naming conventions on the **official maps** issued by the Underground companies. These tended to change far more often than the names on platform signs and tickets. It is debatable about which is the 'official' station name – a debate in which I do not intend to get involved here.

The apostrophe is used to indicate the possessive case – ownership of some form – or that one or more letters have been omitted. The latter case is less relevant to this article, but will be touched upon later.

## STATION OVERVIEW

There are currently eight station names with apostrophes:

- Earl's Court
- King's Cross St. Pancras
- Queen's Park
- Regent's Park
- Shepherd's Bush (two stations)
- St James's Park
- St John's Wood
- St Paul's

Over the years there have been another eight names as well:

- Bayswater (Queen's Road) & Westbourne Grove – now plain Bayswater
- Bishop's Road – renamed Paddington – the Hammersmith & City Line station
- Collier's Wood – now Colliers Wood
- Dover Street (St James's) – now Green Park
- Great Portland Street & Regent's Park – now just Great Portland Street
- Queen's Road – renamed Queensway
- St John's Wood Road – renamed Lords and then closed in 1939
- St Mary's – closed in 1938

And three stations started out in life with apostrophes, but lost them many years ago:

- Parson's Green – last used around 1909. The MDR map for 1881 shows an apostrophe on the actual station (but not on the map subtitle or side text) – it then vanishes until the first UERL map of 1908. The apostrophe appears very small – almost as if its existence is already in doubt. It is retained in the 1909 map, but then vanishes forever. The general usage in the area is erratic – some maps use the apostrophe in some of the road names (e.g., Parson's Green Lane).
- Golder's Green – lost around 1919. The use of the apostrophe in general for the locality appears to be intermittent. Early photographs of the station omit it, even though many early official Underground maps include it. There are no remaining examples of the apostrophe in use in any of the road names near the area.

- Rayner's Lane – lost around 1921. The locality itself appears to have become Rayners Lane towards the late 1920s. However, the dot-matrix indicator on the northbound platform at Preston Road reinstates the lost punctuation.

St James's Park has had the most variety, with three main forms: St James (used rarely), St James' (used from around 1908 until the elimination of the apostrophe in 1933), and St James's (used prior to 1908 and after 1951). All of the roundels at the station use the latter form, bar one which dates from the 1950s. The current version is the grammatically correct form, although the strange habit of dropping the possessive "s" was in vogue in the early 20th century (contrary to *Fowler's Modern English Usage*). Two very odd forms have also appeared as a result of errors: a map of 1881 labels the station as St Jamess Park, and in 1959 London Transport used the name St Jame's Park.

Only two cases of the apostrophe being used regularly to omit letters have been found. Gloucester Road was often abbreviated to Glo'ster Road in the early years of the 20th century, and Marlboro' Road was a regular shortening for Marlborough Road on the Metropolitan Railway. In both cases this sometimes assisted with fitting the names onto geographic maps.

Some stations that one might expect to use the apostrophe never have done – officially.

- Barons Court, being a contrived name (to fit with Earl's Court) has always been without, except around 1919 when an errant apostrophe appeared on a few maps (Ref.1, pages 62-63).
- Carpenders Park – named after Simon le Carpenter (Ref.2, page 25) it might be expected to use the apostrophe. However, no maps have ever used it, and the name of the locality appears always to have been devoid of it.
- Canons Park – a suburb that never appears to have used the apostrophe. Early photographs of the station show it written as it is today.
- Lords – being named after Lord's Cricket Ground, would have been expected to have an apostrophe. However, the name was only used for five months in 1939 before the station closed permanently, and records from the time show it consistently as Lords.

## GENERAL TRENDS

The use of the apostrophe was intermittent in the early years for most of the stations. The UERL maps, which provide the best sample, show high numbers of apostrophes until around 1911, before they rapidly decline. Their map of 1913 is entirely free of the punctuation; the following year it had been reinstated for Queen's Park and St James' Park. The number rises to another peak in 1921, and then falls again to zero in 1928. In 1930 and 1931 only St James' Park and St Mary's get apostrophes, but with the advent of the first Beck map in 1933 all apostrophes vanished. St James's Park became St James Park, and even the trailing apostrophe was dropped from Marlboro Road.

This situation continued for almost twenty years, until in a major revision (grammatically-speaking) in 1951 when the apostrophe, returned to nine stations. This included Collier's Wood – a station that had never previously borne an apostrophe (except in pre-opening publicity).

The last loss of apostrophe occurred in 1987, when LUL changed Collier's Wood to Colliers Wood, leaving eight stations bearing this small punctuation mark.

## SUMMARY

The table below shows the details for the stations using the apostrophe in the possessive form.

Station	Dates	Notes
Bayswater (Queen's Road)	Intermittent	
Bishop's Road		Rarely used
Collier's Wood	1951-1987	Last used on map No. 1 1987 (code 687)
Dover Street (St James's)		Only map showing suffix uses "St James"
Earl's Court	1889	Only one pre-1951 example located
Golder's Green	Until around 1919	Fairly consistent until 1912
Great Portland Street & Regent's Park		Only map showing suffix omits apostrophe
King's Cross St Pancras	1951-	Very rarely used until 1951
Parson's Green	1881, 1908-9	Only appears on very early maps issued by MDR and then UERL
Queen's Park	1914-28	Used by UERL until 1924, and MR until 1928
Queen's Road	Intermittently until 1924	
Rayner's Lane	1921	Only one example found
Regent's Park	1951-	Never before 1951
St James's Park		Rarely omitted – but see section in text concerning variant forms
St John's Wood	Intermittent	
St Mary's	Intermittent	
St Paul's	1951-	Never before 1951, but only acquired name in 'apostrophe-free' period
Shepherd's Bush	1894, 1908	Very rarely used for either MR or CLR stations

## REFERENCES

1. *No Need to Ask!*, David Leboff & Tim Demuth, Capital Transport 1999.
2. *What's in a Name?*, Cyril Harris, Archway 1990.