

REVIEWS

HIDDEN LONDON: MOORGATE – THE METROPOLITAN MAZE

When the LTM released priority tickets in early March for their next batch of Hidden London real and virtual tours, I promptly booked a ticket for the only real tour that I had not been on before. That was to the disused areas of Moorgate station in the City of London, for the morning of 26 April 2023.

Following a meet up outside the new station main entrance in Moorfields, the tour party of 11 were given the obligatory safety briefing and issued with lanyards, before the three guides escorted us through the ticket gates.

We then assembled at the widened portion at the eastern end of the operational platform 1, which is served by eastbound trains on the Metropolitan, Hammersmith & City and outer rail Circle lines. Here we were given an overview of the station's complex history. The station was opened as Moorgate Street in December 1865 by the Metropolitan Railway on its first extension eastwards from the railway's original terminus at Farringdon Street, bringing the railway close to the heart of the City's financial district. Increased traffic from other companies, including goods traffic from the Great Northern Railway to Smithfield meat market, led to the line between King's Cross and Moorgate being widened to four tracks in July 1866. This route became known as the City Widened Lines, terminating in bay platforms at Moorgate.

In February 1900, the pioneering deep level tube railway, the City & South London Railway added platforms at Moorgate via its northern extension, complete with an imposing head office building by the architect Thomas Phillips Figgis, still standing and providing entrances to the station in both roads named Moorgate and Moorfields today. Moorgate station formed the temporary terminus of the C&SLR until further extension northwards to the Angel in November 1901 and today this route forms the city branch of the Northern Line.

Next up in February 1904 was the arrival of the 'big tube', the Great Northern & City Railway, constructed at deep level again but to a larger diameter to accommodate main line size trains, having Moorgate as its southern terminus on its line from Finsbury Park. Having then formed part of the Underground as the Northern City Line for many years, it reverted to main line trains in August 1976, having failed to be joined by the Northern Heights proposals of the New Works Programme following the Second World War.

The station was renamed Moorgate in October 1924. The City Widened Lines used by British Rail trains, more recently by the Thameslink franchise, were withdrawn in March 2009, to facilitate the Thameslink 2000 programme of more frequent and longer trains to run over its core route which required longer platforms at Farringdon. Finally, the Elizabeth Line access to Liverpool Street station opened at Moorgate in May 2022.

The tour participants then descended the escalator to the Northern Line platforms and were led to the southern ends and through a normally locked door into a passageway which led from the original two C&SLR lift shafts (each originally containing two lifts) to the platforms, disused since the installation of the escalators in 1924.

These passageways were tiled full height with white glass wall tiles with two black tile bands at mid height. Then we proceeded through the base of one of the lift shafts to the passageway on the other side, which again had the same glass wall tiling and the remains of black lettering "way out" and "way out to the lifts" present, despite more modern electric conduit and boxes being fixed over obscuring some of the words – see photos below.



Our young enthusiastic lead guide then informed the party of the history of the C&SLR and the subsequent Northern Line. Unfortunately, this contained a few errors and/or missed pertinent information.

Firstly, he told us about the street car financier Charles Tyson Yerkes, how he came to London from America after being booted out of Chicago for his dishonest practices and that he bought up and built three proposed tube railways, which are

what we know today as the core parts of the Bakerloo Line, Piccadilly Line and the Charing Cross branch of today's Northern Line. There was no mention of his purchase of the Metropolitan District Railway though, or of its pioneering use of electric traction development.

When I mentioned this, I was told that the Metropolitan Railway remained independent until the formation of the LTPB in 1933. Oh dear, confusion between the Metropolitan Railway and the Metropolitan District Railway ...

We were then informed that Yerkes went on to acquire the C&SLR in 1913 and extend it to Euston and then to Camden Town joining up with the Charing Cross, Euston & Hampstead Railway one of his three original tubes, enlarging the C&SLR tunnels in 1922-24, all forming the key parts of today's Northern Line. I mentioned Yerkes passed away in 1905, unfortunately without seeing any of his tube railways operational and it was the UERL Group that he established that was responsible for these later developments. This didn't get acknowledged other than by a couple of the other tour participants.

We then went back up to the booking hall, being informed that on the next part of the tour we would be visiting parts of the station operating Network Rail trains and were forbidden to take photographs of any Great Northern trains and their working platform areas. Onwards down via the spiral staircase constructed as part of the GN&CR and close to the bottom of it, we were led through a normally locked door into further disused passageways which I believe were built in 1912 as interchange routes to link this railway with the Metropolitan up above. These were half height white ceramic tiled clad with a single black tile band and with walls and tunnel soffits above painted a dull yellow.



Left: Looking up one of the disused and capped off C&SLR lift shafts, each of which originally contained a pair of lifts. A third lift shaft serving the former GN&C wasn't visited but this was much larger and originally contained three lifts. These were replaced by escalators much later than those of the C&SLR and survived until October 1936.

Following this passage and down a short staircase led us to a mesh-fenced walkway at the southern end of platform 10, which was complete with a Great Northern Class 717 unit just about to depart on its northbound journey to Welwyn Garden City. However, behind the buffer stop, it was possible to walk on a pedestrian bridge across the trackbed which led to a substation, to view a Greathead tunnelling shield, in good condition and left in place in 1903 as it had been expected it would be one day be used on an extension to Lothbury (*Below*). Despite a Bill being approved for this extension, funds were not available and it was not to be. The work sections in the shield where the tunnellers would have worked excavating the clay could clearly be seen. Our guide explained a brief history of tunnelling shields and that James Henry Greathead had developed Brunel's original shield design to a circular shield with screw jacks to allow installation of tunnel linings behind the workface. Sadly, no mention was made that there was a statue of Greathead by The Royal Exchange in Cornhill by Bank station just a short walk away that tour participants could easily walk to see after the tour. In the overrun tunnel of platform 10 were the only exposed tunnel lining segments seen on the tour. Further to my Hidden London visit to Shepherd's Bush station (see *Underground News* No.732), the only embossed railway company or manufacturer's initials here



were GN&CRCo. and BHFCoLtd. These represented the Great Northern & City Railway Company and British Hydraulic Foundry Company Limited of Whiteinch, Glasgow.

Retracing our steps back up to the disused passageway, we stopped to inspect remains of two advert posters on the walls under years of grime, one being for Lifebuoy Soap and probably dating from the 1950s. At the end of the passageway was a large approx 2m diameter disused ventilation fan, obviously installed in an attempt to increase ventilation at platform level. Here the guides explained two disasters affecting Moorgate station. First, Moorgate was heavily bombed during WW2, the worst taking place in 1941, devastating not only the Metropolitan station platforms but a large immediate area around. This subsequently led to the Barbican development during the 1960-80s, including the diversion of the Metropolitan Line and City Widened Lines tracks (1963-1965) to a new alignment to the south. Ironically though, the Metropolitan Line's station entrance building facade survived the bombing only to succumb to demolition in the 1960s.

The second disaster was the Moorgate train crash on 28 February 1975, when a train of 1938 Stock working a service on the then Northern City Line, (the former GN&CR) failed to slow down or stop approaching platform 9 and overran into the dead end tunnel with the sad loss of 43 lives and many serious injuries to those that survived. Today it remains the Underground's worst railway disaster and forced LT to introduce physical measures to slow trains when approaching dead end terminal platforms. Again, there was no mention of the commemorative memorial plaque to this disaster on the side wall of the former C&SLR Head Office building that several of the tour participants discovered for themselves after the tour was over.

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We then were led to the eastern end of the former Thameslink disused City Widened Lines platforms 5 and 6. We then walked the length of platform 5, stopping to view the speed restriction device installed on the track after the Moorgate crash, serving platform 4, (one of two Met., H&C, Circle Line bay platforms), although this device is now disused being made redundant by the 4LM automatic train control. At the extreme west end of platform 5 we were able to peer into the distance under the Barbican development raft slab above and see the City Widened Lines tracks heading towards Barbican station, inclusive of the crossover between the two running lines. We were then informed of the plans to convert these disused tracks into sidings for the Underground's S Stock trains serving the H&C and Circle lines, with a capacity to accommodate 12 trains. Despite the necessary point work being installed to serve these just east of Farringdon Station in 2017, I believe there is now doubt over whether the proposal for these sidings will be realised.

Lastly, we returned to the eastern end of platform 5 and exited into the booking hall by the new stairs opened as part of the Elizabeth Line works in 2022. Here we thanked our guides and were escorted back through the ticket gateline. The tour lasted approximately one hour and revealed much of the fascinating history of this station's maze.

All photos and review – Roger Tuke