

BOXES (ALMOST) NO MORE

For many years, London Transport's signal cabins have been closing one by one in favour of centralised control. The process began back in the 1950s starting with the Northern Line, where a control room was established at Leicester Square. Between 1958 and 1962, the controlled areas between East Finchley and Clapham Common transferred to this room, which was located in the disused lift shaft at the lower level. Control of Tooting Broadway and Morden transferred to another room above the station which took over space vacated by the Metropolitan and Bakerloo Line Traffic Controllers in May 1962¹. The (part) centralisation of the Northern Line signalling up to that point had led to the closure of 12 signal cabins.

Other signal cabins closed were Hampstead (December 1958), Edgware (January 1965) and Colindale (July 1967), all of which were transferred to Golders Green, which became a 'regulating room' for the area between Edgware and Hampstead.

It had been decided that the Victoria Line would be controlled from a new regulating room at Cobourg Street (Euston) which would also accommodate the Northern Line in its entirety once the Victoria Line opened². The Northern Line³ then took up residence at Cobourg Street on the opposite side of the regulating room in late-1969 with the transfer of existing sites from Leicester Square. Finchley Central signal cabin closed in December 1969 when control was transferred to Cobourg Street. In March 1971, the Edgware – Hampstead areas were transferred to Cobourg Street and the last conventional signal cabin of all, at High Barnet, succumbed and closed in September 1971. The centralisation of the Northern Line signalling was thus complete, apart from Park Junction, where the signal cabin remained operational until March 1984⁴.



Left: The Victoria Line side of Cobourg Street taken in 1969, when the extent of the line was between Walthamstow and Victoria – the southern extension to Brixton was realised in 1971. The Traffic Controller sat on a dais with the traffic regulator at a lower level. The Northern Line Traffic Controller sat to the right on the dais with five signalling desks in the lower area. Later, a large glass screen was added to try and reduce the noise in the room but this wasn't successful and was later removed.

Photo: LT Museum

¹ The Traffic Controllers had occupied adjoining rooms over Leicester Square station from 1939-40, which was renamed from Cranbourn Chambers to Transad House on 4 July 1960. The decision to de-centralise the Control office saw the Met/Bakerloo moving out in May 1962. However, it was a slow process with the Central Line the last, finally moving out to Baker Street on 21 May 1979.

² Cobourg Street control room opened on 4 August 1968 with the first stage of the Victoria Line opening on 1 September 1968. The signalling for the first stage (Walthamstow – Highbury) was commissioned from the opening of the room for four weeks of training and trial running.

³ The lines of London Transport railways were then arranged in 'Divisions' – 'A' Division was then the Metropolitan and Bakerloo, 'B' Division was the Northern Line, to which was added the Victoria Line in 1968, 'C' Division was the District and Piccadilly and 'D' Division the Central Line.

⁴ There were ambitious plans for Park Junction signal cabin under the 1935-40 New Works Programme, which was to control the junction of the East Finchley and Alexandra Palace lines, a double-ended Highgate depot, double-ended Highgate Wood Sidings and access to Wellington goods yard. With an anticipated 83 signal/point levers, it would have been one of the larger LT signal cabins if its full potential had been realised. Although it did control the Alexandra Palace branch junction and Wellington goods yard, those closed in 1954 and 1962 respectively. The south end of Highgate Depot was never used as intended and Highgate Wood Sidings, such as they were, were controlled by a ground shunter. All that Park Junction signal cabin controlled after the closure of the stock transfer route to Finsbury Park, was the access to the north end of the depot and a shunting neck for Highgate Wood Sidings.

NORTHERN LINE – CENTRALISED CONTROL

LOCATION	LOCAL CONTROL	CENTRALISED CONTROL			
		GOLDERS GREEN	LEICESTER SQ (LOWER)	LEICESTER SQ (UPPER)	COBOURG STREET
Edgware	–	31.01.1965	–	–	14.03.1971
Colindale	–	16.07.1967	–	–	14.03.1971
Golders Green	15.10.1961	–	–	–	14.03.1971
Hampstead	{ 07.12.1958 at Golders Green	–	–	–	} 14.03.1971
High Barnet	–	–	–	–	12.09.1971
Finchley Central	–	–	–	–	14.12.1969
East Finchley	–	–	25.06.1961	–	09.11.1969
Archway	–	–	25.06.1961	–	09.11.1969
Camden Town	18.09.1955	–	15.06.1958	–	26.10.1969
Strand	–	–	29.10.1961	–	28.11.1969
Euston (City)	–	–	16.11.1958	–	16.11.1969
King's Cross	–	–	13.05.1962	–	16.11.1969
Moorgate	–	–	05.11.1961	–	23.11.1969
London Bridge	–	–	11.03.1962	–	23.11.1969
Kennington	–	–	26.01.1958	–	30.11.1969
Stockwell	–	–	–	–	24.07.1976
Clapham Common	–	–	23.07.1961	–	05.12.1969
Tooting Broadway	{ 30.08.1959 at Morden	–	–	} 29.07.1962	14.12.1969
Morden	–	–	–	12.08.1962	14.12.1969

It should be noted that Stockwell was added in July 1976, having replaced the reversing facility at Clapham Common, which was decommissioned on 26 June 1976.

MORE CENTRALISATION

So, centralisation of signalling was to be the way forward and also starting in 1960 was a programme to centralise the District Line and, of course, the Piccadilly Line where they interfaced. A temporary regulating room opened at Earl's Court in October 1960 where six areas were added up to 1964, resulting in the closure of six signal cabins. A permanent regulating room was established at the Warwick Road end of the station in July 1965, with further conversions and signal cabin closures following. By May 1970, the District Line from Ealing Common to Tower Hill (and High Street Kensington) was controlled from Earl's Court regulating room, as was the Piccadilly Line as far as Barons Court. Further conversions followed and by 1980 controlled from Heathrow, South Harrow and Ealing Broadway to King's Cross⁵ and Tower Hill. Centralised control of the east end of the District Line never took place but the east end of the Piccadilly Line was completed in 1982, not with the (by then) outdated programme machines but by computer control⁶. There were many problems with the computer in its early days and it gained the nicknames of Metal Mickey and Evil Edna ...

In the 1980s, the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines followed suit with a purpose-built control room at Baker Street. However, this followed the way of Earl's Court and only Stanmore – Baker Street – Aldgate became controlled from Baker Street, after some fairly long gaps between commissioning stages. Suffice to say that the first conversion was Stanmore (April 1984) and the last was Farringdon – Liverpool Street in March 2001. A second purpose-built control room was also provided at Baker Street for the Bakerloo Line, opening in 1990.

AND THEN THERE WERE FOUR

The only four signal cabins left on the Underground are now:

Amersham – controls Amersham, Chalfont & Latimer and the Chesham single line.

Rickmansworth – controls Rickmansworth, the Watford junctions and Watford.

Harrow-on-the-Hill – controls Harrow-on-the-Hill and Northwood.

Rayners Lane – controls Rayners Lane, Ruislip Siding and Uxbridge.

⁵ The connections to and from the Victoria Line at Finsbury Park were controlled from Cobourg Street.

⁶ London Transport had previously experimented with computer control of signalling at Watford and Heathrow.

We should not forget that the last of the original control rooms standing is at Earl's Court, which has control of just Parsons Green and Putney Bridge, although the latter has no longer has crossover facilities – its only use is a regulating point. This will finally close when the (watered down) 4LM stage SMA12 (Fulham Broadway – East Putney) goes live, possibly in 2026.

The following is a small selection of signal cabins that have long closed, these being on the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines.

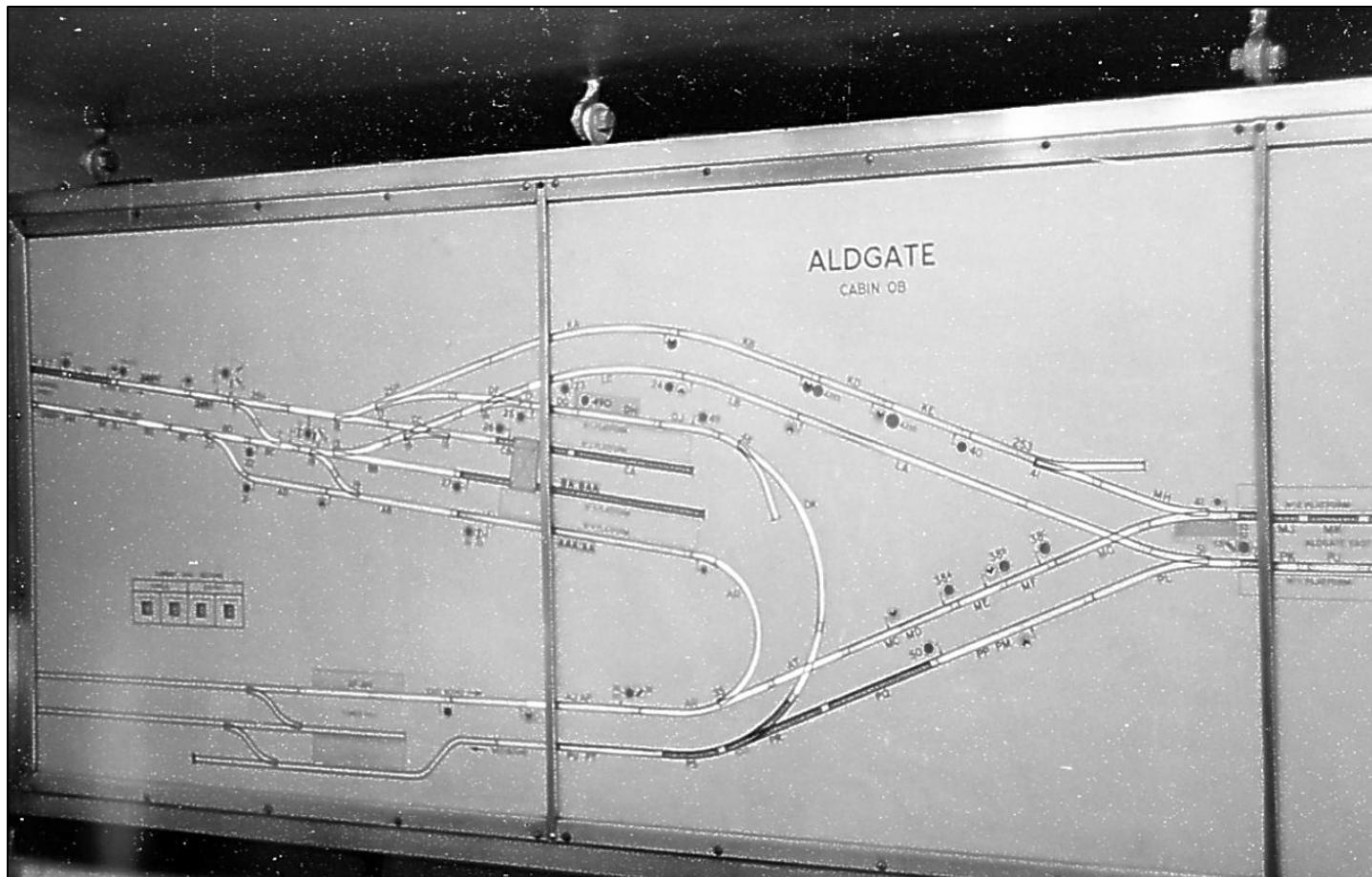
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ALDGATE

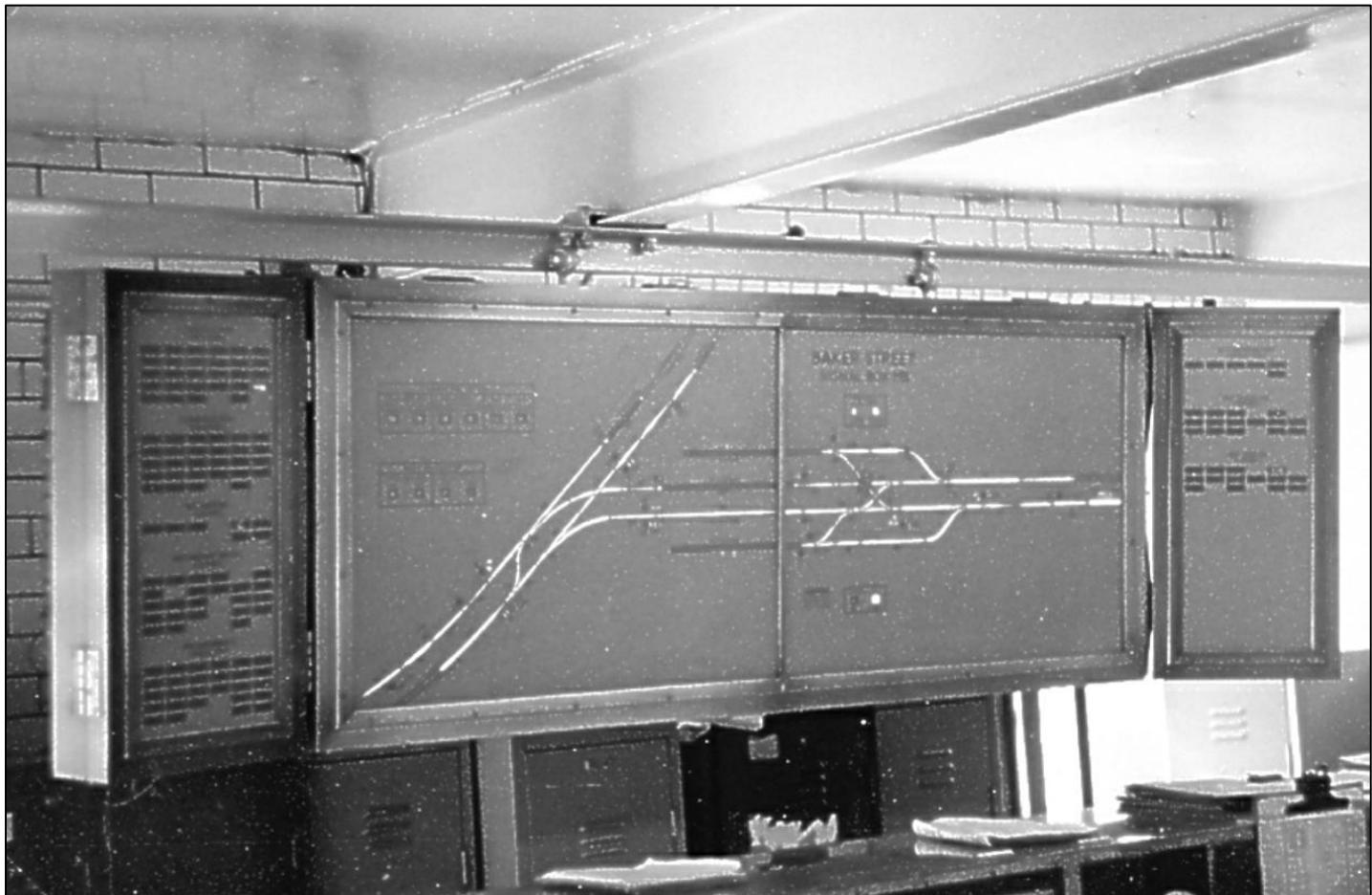


The signalman's view of Aldgate North Junction (*Left*), looking down as a westbound Hammersmith & City Line train leaves the North Curve and heads off towards Liverpool Street. At far left is the former signal box, which was operational just 19 years from May 1927 until May 1946 and carried the code 'H'. It is on the site of a former siding for steam locos. The signal cabin spanning the tracks at the north end of the station opened on 19 May 1946 with code 'OB' and controlled the whole of the Aldgate, Aldgate East and Minories Junction areas. The signal frame was type N and had 59 levers. The gap between the inner rail

track on the far left and the next track to the right is where the electric loco spur was until January 1964. The signalman's diagram (*Below*), shows the lines to and from Liverpool Street at top left and then Aldgate North Junction. To the right are the four platforms of Aldgate station, above which is the North Curve to Aldgate East, which is at far right. The southern curve of the District Line is below, with Minories Junction in the lower centre. At lower left is Tower Hill, which was not controlled by Aldgate but was provided for indication purposes. Aldgate signal cabin closed at the end of traffic on 24 January 1988, with control passed to Farringdon.



BAKER STREET (MET.)



The Metropolitan Line signal cabin at Baker Street stood against a retaining wall at the north end of and adjacent to platform 4. Opening on 6 April 1924, it replaced a previous signal box which was a little to the south of it. It had a K style frame with 39 levers and originally was coded 'A', later becoming 'M' and then 'MB' in February 1947. The lines to/from Great Portland Street come in at lower left, above which is Baker Street Junction with the line to Edgware Road going straight on. The 'main line' station is in the centre and to the right. Baker Street signal cabin closed after traffic on 11 June 1988. To the right and left of the diagram are the indications for the train descriptions. It should be noted that the occupation of track circuits caused the diagram to go dark, with unoccupied track circuits illuminated. More modern practices reversed this, with track circuit occupation in red and unoccupied track circuits not illuminated.

NEASDEN NORTH



Situated at the north end of Neasden Depot, this cabin controlled depot movements and entry/exit to and from Wembley Park. It opened on 22 May 1939 and had an N style frame with 47 levers. It closed on 14 October 1987.

NEASDEN SOUTH

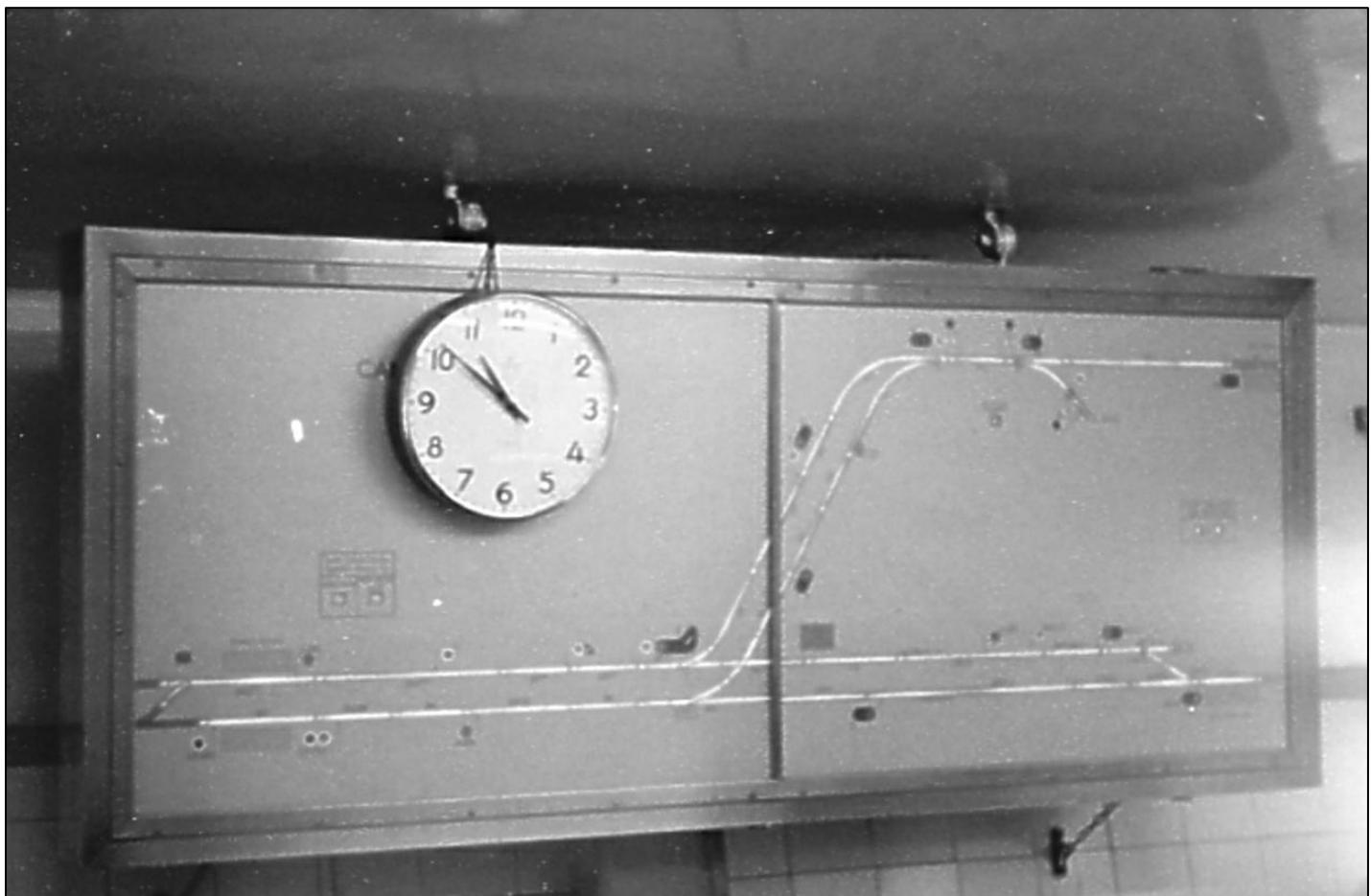


Located at the south end of the depot between the 'Klondyke' tracks and main depot, this opened on 27 June 1938, comprising an N style frame with 83 levers. It closed on 29 October 1988 with control to Baker Street signalling control centre.

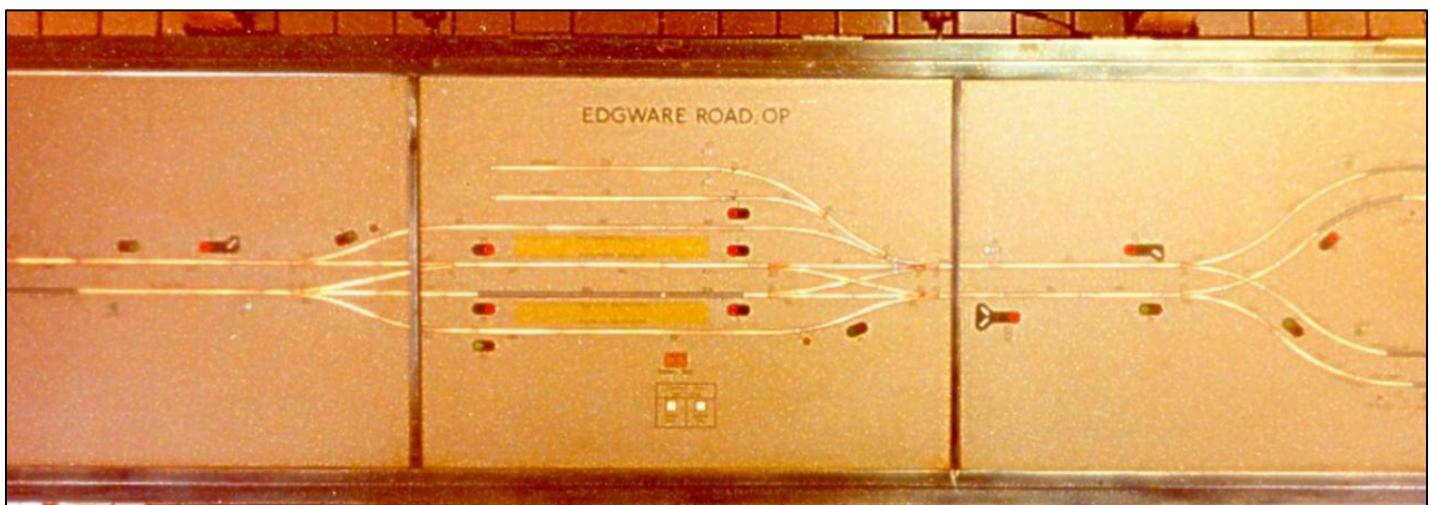
CANAL JUNCTION



Situated in the 'v' of the junction where the New Cross and New Cross Gate lines part company, this signal cabin (*Left*) opened on 8 October 1950 with a B style frame with 23 levers, coded 'ET'. The photograph of the diagram (*Below*) was taken in 1979, long after all the various goods connections to both main lines had been abolished. At bottom left is Surrey Docks, which had an emergency crossover with ground frame, Canal Junction itself is at lower centre with the route to New Cross Gate straight ahead. New Cross goes above and to the right with the depot access at top right centre.



EDGWARE ROAD



Opened on 10 October 1926 to control Praed Street Junction (and the rest of Edgware Road three weeks later), the signal cabin was a K style frame with 39 levers. It was located towards the west end of eastbound platform 1 against the retaining wall. Originally coded 'B', it became 'OP' from 2 December 1951. There were originally two sidings on the westbound side, but one was removed before the introduction of S7 Stock. Edgware Road cabin closed on 1 September 2019 and was the second 'conventional' cabin to close under the 4LM resignalling of the SSR lines after Hammersmith H&C on 17 March 2019.



Left: Praed Street Junction looking west, with the lines to Paddington (Circle) to the left and to Paddington (H&C) to the right. Note the iron structure at the top of the tunnel just above the centre. This also appears clearly in an original print (Below, Left) around the time of opening with broad gauge steam traction, but looking in the opposite direction.

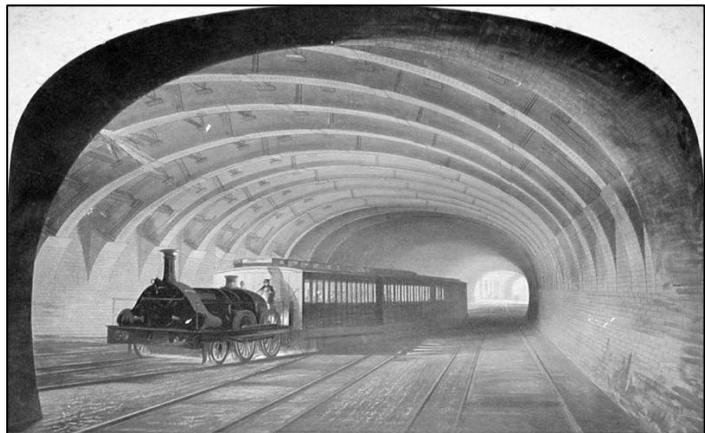


Photo Below Left: LT Museum

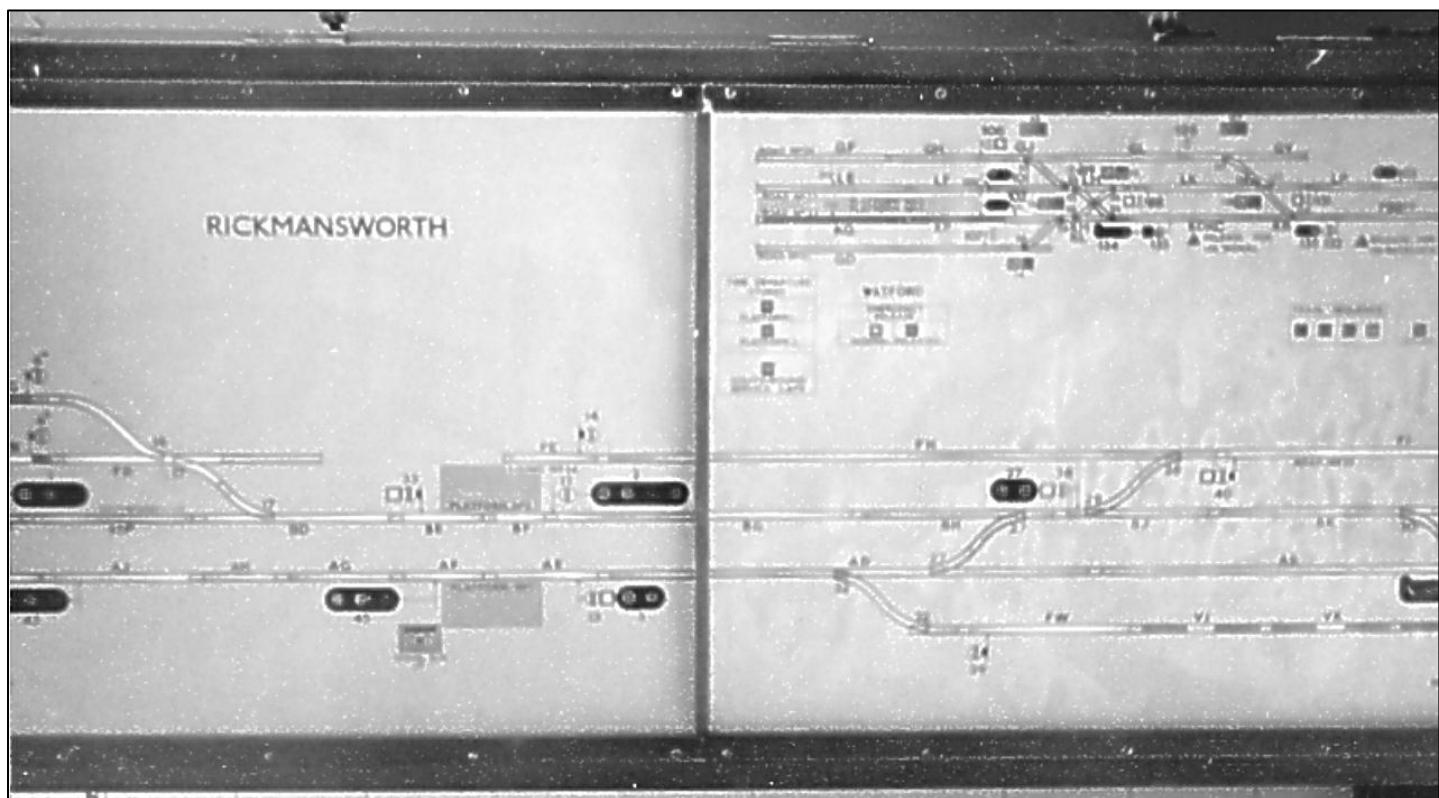
HAMMERSMITH H&C



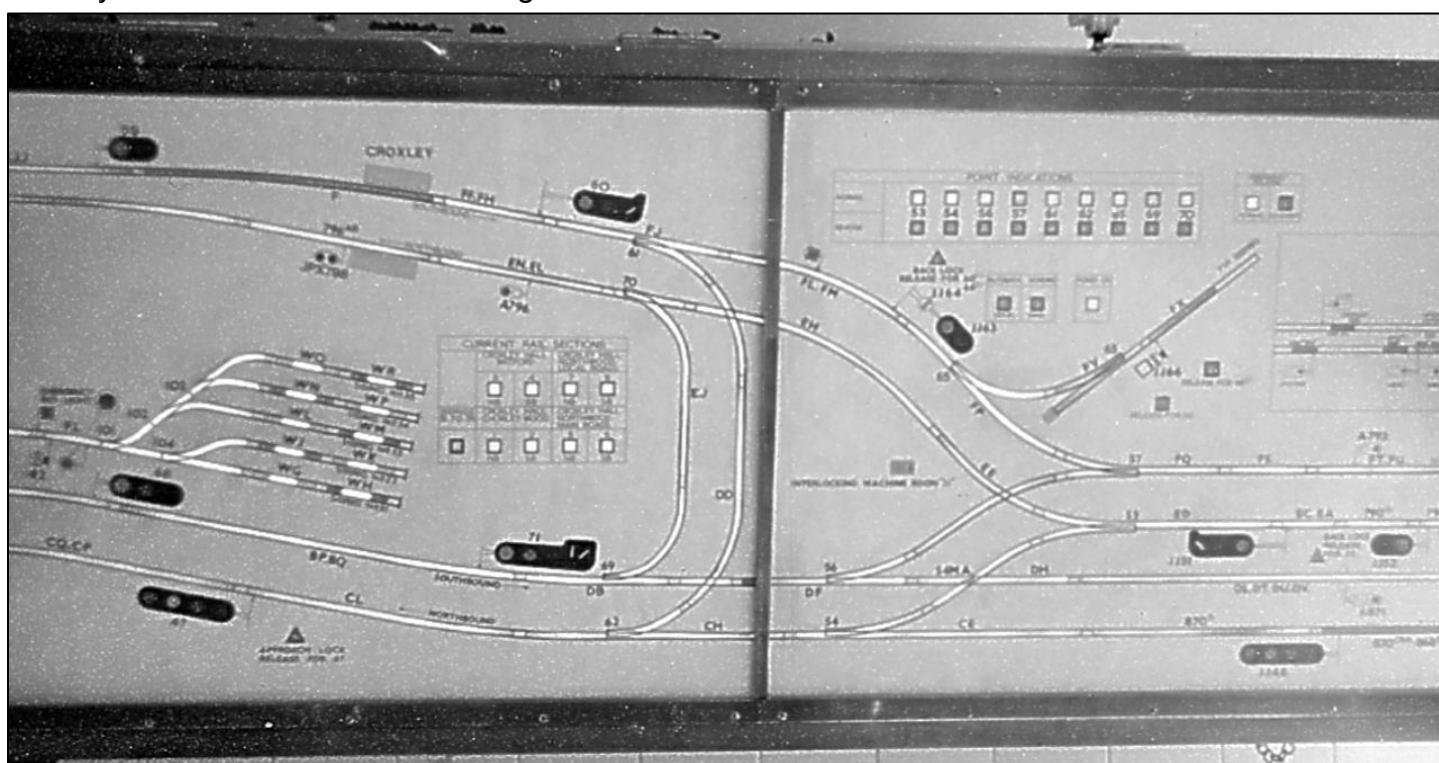
Hammersmith H&C signal cabin (Above, Left) was situated on the eastbound side just 'north' of the station. Allocated the code letters 'OZ', it had an N style frame with 39 levers. When opened on 24 June 1951, there was also an operational goods yard. A mix of C69 and C77 Stocks are seen in the depot (Left). The shunting neck was adjacent to platform 1 and an empty stock shunt is seen (Above) having been through the foam arch wash.

RICKMANSWORTH

Rickmansworth signal cabin, located at the north end of the northbound platform, opened on 6 December 1953 and has an N style frame with 47 levers. Its area of coverage was extended on 17 June 1955 to control the Watford junctions, with operation from a push button panel on the frame, and Watford itself from 28 September 1958 by programme machines. It also controlled the new south sidings from 28 May 1961. The cabin remains open but will close when stage SMA13 of the 4LM signalling is commissioned.



The diagram is split into four sections, those (Above) covering from north of Rickmansworth to south of the station and, at the top, the Watford area. When photographed in 1985, the bay platform at Rickmansworth was still in use for the berthing of sleet locos. The diagram (Below) shows Rickmansworth south sidings lower left, then the Watford junctions – north (at the bottom), east (at the top) and south (to the right), along with the access to Watford Tip sidings. The goods yards at Watford, Croxley and Rickmansworth had long since closed.

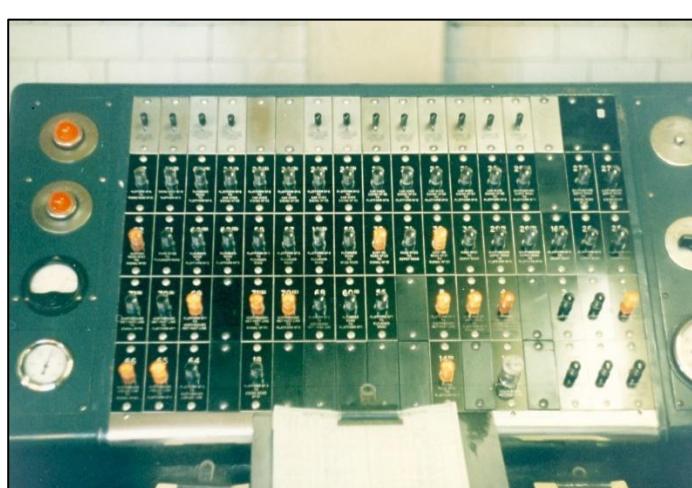


STANMORE



Stanmore cabin opened on 29 May 1938 and replaced the CTC system that was hitherto controlled from Wembley Park when the branch was opened in 1932. Comprising an N style frame with 47 levers and coded 'MK', the cabin was located towards the south end of platform 1 against a cutting wall (Left). The photograph of the diagram (Above) shows direct access to and from Canons Park into the ten sidings which replaced seven in June 1976. The cabin closed after traffic on 24 October 1986, being the first to close in the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines centralisation to Baker Street which was never completed as planned. The cabin was subsequently demolished to make way for a third platform in connection with service improvements.

WEMBLEY PARK

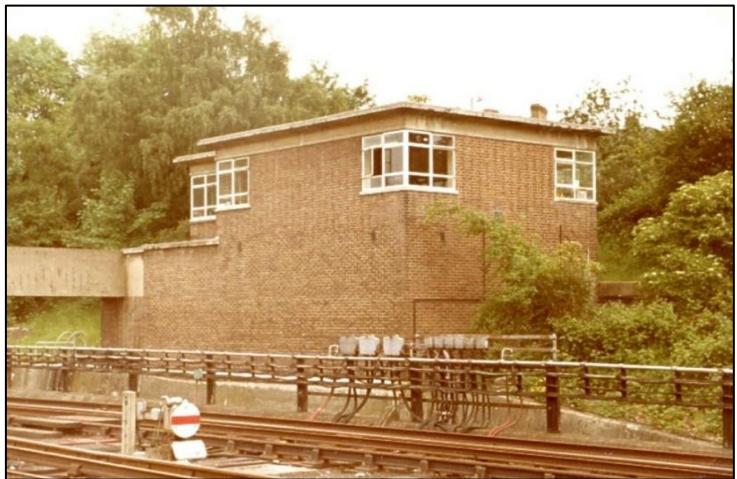
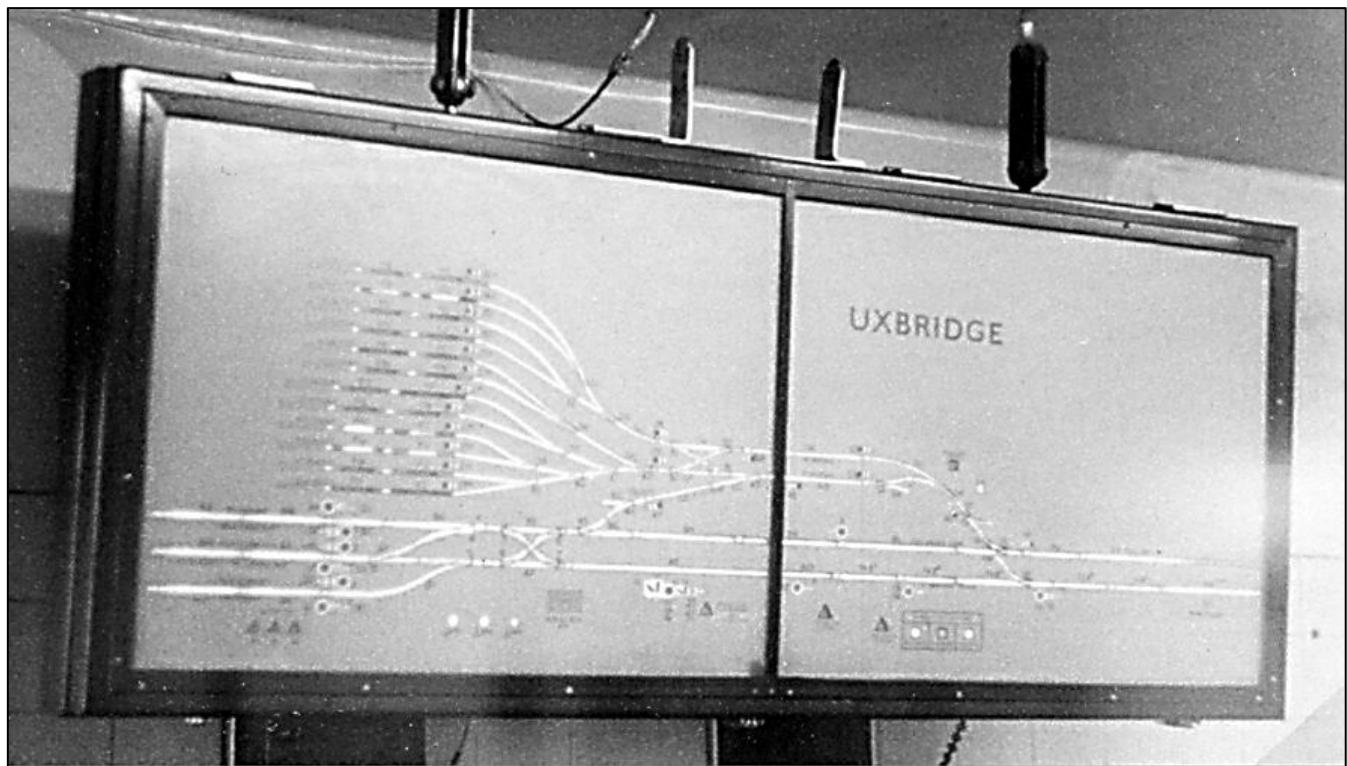


This signal cabin at Wembley Park opened on 26 September 1954 following track reorganisation in the area and was located at the north end of platforms 2 and 3 (Metropolitan and Bakerloo). Instead of signal levers, a push-button desk was provided with 59 push button routes (Above, Right) with the code 'MG'. The diagram (Above, Left) also shows the five sidings in Wembley Park shed. This clearly shows that occupied track circuits are in red and unoccupied track circuits remain dark. Interestingly at Wembley Park, in a closed off area of the signal cabin, was a still intact lever frame which was partly

replaced by the push button panel in 1954⁷. Although the signal cabin was a fairly large building, the area open to the signalman was relatively small as a result of the closed off area. The cabin closed after traffic on 11 April 1987 on transfer to Baker Street signalling centre. Moreover, when the Jubilee Line sites were transferred to Baker Street, semi-automatic areas were re-coded, for example, Stanmore MK to JL and Jubilee Line signals at Wembley Park from MG to JG. The Metropolitan Line controlled areas kept their first letter 'M' unchanged.

UXBRIDGE

Uxbridge signal cabin opened on 4 December 1938 when the replacement three-track four-platform station opened on a new alignment – the old two-platform station in Belmont Road and original Metropolitan Railway signal box then closed. Situated in a cutting wall on the westbound side just beyond Park Road bridge on the Uxbridge station side, it was coded 'MW' from the start. It had an N style frame with 59 levers. The box closed at the end of traffic on 3 May 1987, when control was passed to Rayners Lane with a push button panel there. This was supposed to be a temporary arrangement until subsequent transfer to Baker Street signalling control centre which, of course, never happened. In the end, Baker Street signalling centre only ever controlled Stanmore (Jubilee) and Wembley Park (Met. and Jubilee) to Aldgate and Charing Cross instead of from Amersham/Chesham/Watford/Uxbridge/Stanmore to Charing Cross/Aldgate, plus Hammersmith to Baker Street. The 1980 photo shows that Uxbridge Sidings then had two reception roads (now only one) and access to and from the sidings direct from Hillingdon (now, trains can only exit).



⁷ Part of the 1932 lever frame was retained and converted to work with the push button desk in 1954, and the remainder was left in situ, out of use.

Opposite: (Lower Left) The signal lever frame at Uxbridge in 1980 – uncoupling and coupling on the Metropolitan Line was still taking place and even though this was discontinued the following year, the signalling for it remained until the cabin closed.

Opposite/Previous Page: (Lower Right) The signal cabin at Uxbridge, as viewed in 1981 from the sidings.

CENTRALISATION AND PART CENTRALISATION OF SIGNALLING

AS AT 30 JUNE 2025

METROPOLITAN LINE

Aldgate – Preston Road (from Hammersmith).

Harrow-on-the-Hill – Northwood (from Harrow⁸).

Moor Park – Rickmansworth and Watford (from Rickmansworth).

Chalfont & Latimer – Amersham and Chesham (from Amersham).

Rayners Lane – Uxbridge (from Rayners Lane).

CIRCLE AND HAMMERSMITH & CITY LINES

Complete (from Hammersmith).

DISTRICT LINE

Upminster and Edgware Road – Olympia, Fulham Broadway and Barons Court (from Hammersmith).

Barons Court – Ealing Broadway (from South Kensington).

Fulham Broadway – East Putney (from Earl's Court).

East Putney – Wimbledon (from Wimbledon).

Gunnersbury – Richmond (from Richmond).

JUBILEE LINE

Complete (from Neasden).

NORTHERN LINE

Complete (from Highgate).

VICTORIA LINE

Complete (from Northumberland Park).

PICCADILLY LINE

Cockfosters – Heathrow and South Harrow (from South Kensington).

Rayners Lane – Uxbridge (from Rayners Lane).

CENTRAL LINE

Complete (from Wood Lane)

BAKERLOO LINE

Elephant & Castle – Queen's Park (from Baker Street)

Queen's Park – Harrow & Wealdstone (controlled by Network Rail from Wembley)

WATERLOO & CITY LINE

Complete (from Waterloo)

SIGNAL CABINS / SIGNALLING CONTROL CENTRES TO BE CLOSED

4LM SMA AREA

Amersham SMA13

Rickmansworth SMA13

Rayners Lane SMA14

Harrow-on-the-Hill SMA9

Earl's Court † SMA12

Note that Barons Court – Stamford Brook is SMA10 and no signal cabins are involved in closure.

† Earl's Court control room. The District Line Traffic Controllers moved to Baker Street on 3 February 2008, the Piccadilly Line to South Kensington on 5 June 2018, leaving only the regulators (later senior signalmen), which were reduced in number as various SMA migration stages were commissioned.

⁸ To be closed at 4LM SMA9 commissioning.