

# THE NORTHERN LINE PLATFORM INDICATORS REVISITED

by Kim Rennie

*Original research by Brian Hardy*

## INTRODUCTION

Most of the data in this article was originally compiled by Brian Hardy and first published in the January 1981 (issue 7) of *Underground*, the LURS' then occasional features magazine. Today, following the advent of modern word processing, and with *Underground News* now a fully-illustrated journal, the information can be presented again, but now in a form more closely akin to its original appearance. Nevertheless, the visualisations that follow can only be approximations of how things were in reality<sup>1</sup>.

## INDICATOR TYPES

Back in 1981, there were two main designs of station platform indicator on the Northern Line. The older ones were the 'sectioned' type, with each destination or route lettered on an individual 'grey' horizontal glass plate, stacked in columns, and illuminated by tungsten bulbs. These mostly dated from 1926, after the combination of the Edgware, Highgate (Archway) and Morden branches resulted in multiple destinations and routes, all of which had to be easily communicated to passengers. The indicators could show up to the first two, or the first three, trains, depending on location. At certain stations, but not all, an extra column was added to display additional information (e.g. – 'CHANGE AT KENNINGTON FOR MORDEN', or 'FOR CITY LINE CHANGE AT GOLDERS GREEN'). Such indicators had not been required in the early days of the 1900s 'Tube' railways as there were no branches, trains generally ran from end-to-end, and Gatemen were available to make announcements to passengers.

The other common design emerged in the early-1960s and consisted of a single (or more) sheet of black glass, with destinations illuminated by fluorescent tubes, and numerals (1, 2, etc) lit by tungsten bulbs, and had become the modern standard across the network. As recorded before in these pages, the Johnston lettering was made especially thin to ensure displays did not appear blurred when viewed from a distance. On the Northern Line, these signs were mainly installed at multi-platform termini to give some clarity to 'first train out' information, often replacing earlier types, but also appeared when station platforms were modernised.

There were also a number of non-standard indicators. Those at Archway (formerly Highgate) were originally designed for when the station was a terminus, and northbound trains could be routed into and reverse southbound in either platform. A similar sign was provided at Edgware (platforms 1 & 2, now platforms 2 & 3). Other non-standard indicators were on the Barnet extension, which had opened in stages between 1939 and 1940.

*Underground News* reported the appearance on 14 January 1983 of a dot-matrix indicator at Euston northbound (Bank branch). Within a few years, signs of this type had replaced all the older indicators on the Northern Line and were also installed at locations that had never previously been fitted with such equipment (listed below). These in turn were eventually superseded by newer equipment in the 2000s under the Tube Lines PPP scheme.

## NORTHBOUND INDICATORS

Fig. 1 – Morden – overbridge level

NEXT TRAIN PLATFORM 2 3 5 VIA CHARING CROSS TO VIA BANK TO	2 <sup>ND</sup> TRAIN PLATFORM 2 3 5 VIA CHARING CROSS TO VIA BANK TO	3 <sup>RD</sup> TRAIN PLATFORM 2 3 5 VIA CHARING CROSS TO VIA BANK TO
EDGWARE COLINDALE EDGWARE GOLDERS GREEN FINCHLEY CENTRAL HIGH BARNET MILL HILL EAST	EDGWARE COLINDALE EDGWARE GOLDERS GREEN FINCHLEY CENTRAL HIGH BARNET MILL HILL EAST	EDGWARE COLINDALE EDGWARE GOLDERS GREEN FINCHLEY CENTRAL HIGH BARNET MILL HILL EAST

Fig. 2 – Morden – platforms 2, 3 & 5 (1979)

<sup>1</sup> For example, it has not been possible to accurately portray the style of arrow used on the 1960s and 1970s indicators.

FIRST TRAIN  
EDGWARE BRANCH  
BARNET BRANCH  
via BANK  
via CHARING CROSS

*Right: As a 1959 Tube Stock enters Morden platform 2, one of the modern indicators installed in February 1979 is clearly visible. A Gloucester-built 1956 Prototype Tube Stock unit is on the left in the middle platform.*

*Photo: Brian Hardy*



**Fig. 3 – South Wimbledon to Clapham North northbound (1926)**<sup>2</sup>

FIRST	SECOND	
EDGWARE LINE	EDGWARE LINE	
BARNET LINE	BARNET LINE	
EUSTON	EUSTON	
VIA BANK	VIA BANK	
VIA CHARING +	VIA CHARING +	

**Fig. 4 – Stockwell northbound (1977)**

FIRST TRAIN HIGH BARNET EDGWARE MILL HILL EAST FINCHLEY CENTRAL COLINDALE GOLDERS GREEN HAMPSTEAD via BANK via CHARING CROSS	SECOND TRAIN HIGH BARNET EDGWARE MILL HILL EAST FINCHLEY CENTRAL COLINDALE GOLDERS GREEN HAMPSTEAD via BANK via CHARING CROSS
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**Fig. 5 – Oval northbound (1926)**

FIRST	SECOND	
EDGWARE LINE	EDGWARE LINE	
BARNET LINE	BARNET LINE	
EUSTON	EUSTON	
VIA BANK	VIA BANK	
VIA EMBANKMENT	VIA EMBANKMENT	

**Fig. 6 – Kennington (Charing Cross branch) – platform 1**

NEXT TRAIN
COLINDALE
EDGWARE LINE
MILL HILL EAST
GOLDERS GREEN
ARCHWAY
HIGH BARNET

**Fig. 7 – Elephant & Castle / London Bridge / King's Cross northbound (1926)**

FIRST	SECOND
EDGWARE LINE	EDGWARE LINE
BARNET LINE	BARNET LINE
EUSTON	EUSTON

**Fig. 8 – Bank northbound (1926)**

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	
EDGWARE	EDGWARE	EDGWARE	
COLINDALE	COLINDALE	COLINDALE	
GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN	
HAMPSTEAD	HAMPSTEAD	HAMPSTEAD	
HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET	

<sup>2</sup> Where applicable, double-sided signs are shown as viewed when looking in the direction of travel.

MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST
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**Fig. 9** – Moorgate northbound (1977)

3	2	1	HIGH BARNET
3	2	1	MILL HILL EAST
3	2	1	FINCHLEY CENTRAL
3	2	1	EDGWARE
3	2	1	COLINDALE
3	2	1	GOLDERS GREEN
3	2	1	HAMPSTEAD

**Fig. 10** – Old Street northbound (1980)

FIRST TRAIN
BARNET BRANCH
MILL HILL EAST
ARCHWAY
EDGWARE
COLINDALE
GOLDERS GREEN
HAMPSTEAD

**Fig. 11** – Euston (Bank branch) northbound – platform 3

FIRST TRAIN	SECOND TRAIN	THIRD TRAIN
BARNET BRANCH	BARNET BRANCH	BARNET BRANCH
MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST
ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY
EDGWARE	EDGWARE	EDGWARE
COLINDALE	COLINDALE	COLINDALE
GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN
HAMPSTEAD	HAMPSTEAD	HAMPSTEAD

**Fig. 12** – Waterloo / Leicester Square to Euston (Charing Cross branch) northbound (1926)

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
EDGWARE	EDGWARE	EDGWARE
COLINDALE	COLINDALE	COLINDALE
GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN
ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY
HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET
MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST

**Fig. 13** – Embankment northbound (1926)

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
EDGWARE	EDGWARE	EDGWARE
MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST
GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN
ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY
HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET
COLINDALE	COLINDALE	COLINDALE

**Fig. 14** – Charing Cross northbound (1979)<sup>3</sup>

3	2	1	HIGH BARNET
3	2	1	MILL HILL EAST
3	2	1	FINCHLEY CENTRAL
3	2	1	EDGWARE
3	2	1	COLINDALE
3	2	1	GOLDERS GREEN
3	2	1	HAMPSTEAD
3	2	1	NOT IN SERVICE

**Fig. 15** – Mornington Crescent northbound (1966)

FIRST TRAIN	SECOND TRAIN
EDGWARE	EDGWARE
COLINDALE	COLINDALE
GOLDERS GREEN	GOLDERS GREEN
HAMPSTEAD	HAMPSTEAD
HIGH BARNET	HIGH BARNET
MILL HILL EAST	MILL HILL EAST
FINCHLEY CENTRAL	FINCHLEY CENTRAL
ARCHWAY	ARCHWAY

**Fig. 16** – Camden Town northbound – platform 1

NEXT TRAIN	
HAMPSTEAD	
GOLDERS GREEN	CHANGE THERE FOR STATIONS BEYOND

**Fig. 17** – Camden Town northbound – platform 3

FIRST TRAIN
BARNET LINE
MILL HILL EAST FINCHLEY
CENTRAL

<sup>3</sup> The train description 4-wire code system then in use meant it was not possible to illuminate the FINCHLEY CENTRAL, HAMPSTEAD or NOT IN SERVICE displays. Full details of the codes can be found in Underground No.7, available in the Historical Archive section of the LURS website: [historicalarchive \(lurs.org.uk\)](http://historicalarchive.lurs.org.uk)

COLINDALE	CHANGE THERE FOR BURNT OAK AND EDGWARE
	EDGWARE

ARCHWAY

**Fig. 18** – Golders Green northbound – platforms 1 & 2

q5555--s	TRAIN FOR STATIONS TO
	COLINDALE
	EDGWARE

**Fig. 19** – Archway northbound (1926)

NEXT TRAIN		
	FINCHLEY CENTRAL	
	STOPS HERE	
	BARNET LINE	
	MILL HILL EAST	

**Fig. 20** – East Finchley northbound (1939)

FIRST TRAIN
HIGH BARNET
MILL HILL EAST
FINCHLEY CENTRAL
FOR MILL HILL EAST
CHANGE AT FINCHLEY CENTRAL

**Fig. 21** – Finchley Central northbound (1940)

TRAIN INDICATOR		
q-5	HIGH BARNET	-5p
q-5	MILL HILL EAST	-5p

## SOUTHBOUND INDICATORS

**Fig. 22** – Edgware – platforms 2 & 3 (1924)

SOUTHBOUND TRAINS		
q-5	VIA CHARING CROSS	-5p
q-5	VIA BANK	-5p
	FOR CITY LINE CHANGE AT CAMDEN TOWN	
q-5	NEXT TRAIN OUT	-5p

**Fig. 23** – Edgware – platforms 1 & 2 (display as in 1924)<sup>4</sup>

NEXT TRAIN FOR		
q-5	CHARING CROSS	-5p
q-5	MOORGATE	-5p
	MMMMMM M MMMM M MMMM MM MM MM MM MM MM MM MM MM MM	
q-5	NEXT TRAIN OUT	-5p

**Fig. 24** – Edgware – platforms 2 & 3

NEXT TRAIN OUT -p
q--- NEXT TRAIN OUT
VIA CHARING CROSS -p
q--- VIA CHARING CROSS
VIA BANK -p
q--- VIA BANK
FOR CITY LINE CHANGE AT CAMDEN TOWN

**Fig. 25** – Edgware – platform 1

FIRST TRAIN
VIA CHARING CROSS -p
VIA BANK -p

**Fig. 26** – Edgware – footbridge (1926)

PLATFORM			
3	2	1	VIA BANK
3	2	1	VIA CHARING +

**Fig. 27** – Burnt Oak to Camden Town / Tufnell Park to Camden Town southbound (1926)

FIRST	SECOND	FOR MORDEN LINE CHANGE AT KENNINGTON	
		MORDEN	MORDEN
KENNINGTON	KENNINGTON		FOR CITY LINE CHANGE AT GOLDERS GREEN
VIA BANK	VIA BANK		
VIA CHARING + & WATERLOO	VIA CHARING + & WATERLOO		

<sup>4</sup> Lettering on third plate not decipherable on official LT photo. Platforms renumbered in 1932 when a third platform was provided (as platform 1). The sign was illustrated in *Underground News* No.752, page 486.

**Fig. 28** – Golders Green southbound – platforms 4 & 5

THIS TRAIN –p via CHARING CROSS via BANK Terminates Here
FIRST TRAIN OUT –p q--- FIRST TRAIN OUT

**Fig. 29** – Golders Green southbound – platforms 4 & 5 (1926)

SOUTHBOUND TRAINS		
q-5	VIA CHARING CROSS	-5p
q-5	VIA BANK	-5p
q-5	NEXT TRAIN OUT	-5p

**Fig. 30** – High Barnet – overbridge

FIRST			SECOND			THIRD					
PLATFORM	1	2	3	PLATFORM	1	2	3	PLATFORM	1	2	3
→	←	←	→	←	←	→	←	→	←	←	→
VIA CHARING +				VIA CHARING +				VIA CHARING +			
VIA BANK				VIA BANK				VIA BANK			
EAST FINCHLEY				EAST FINCHLEY				EAST FINCHLEY			

**Fig. 31** – High Barnet – platforms 2 & 3

FIRST TRAIN OUT
PLATFORM 1
q PLATFORM 2
PLATFORM 3 p

**Fig. 32** – High Barnet – platform 1

FIRST TRAIN OUT
PLATFORM 1 p
PLATFORM 2
PLATFORM 3

**Fig. 33** – High Barnet – platforms 1, 2 & 3

FIRST TRAIN		
VIA BANK		EAST FINCHLEY
VIA CHARING CROSS		

**Fig. 34** – Finchley Central southbound (1940)

NEXT TRAIN	
VIA BANK	
VIA CHARING CROSS	

**Fig. 35** – East Finchley southbound (1939)

qr5s FIRST TRAIN
VIA CHARING CROSS
VIA BANK

**Fig. 36** – Highgate southbound (1941)

NORTHERN LINE
– NEXT TRAIN –
VIA BANK
VIA CHARING CROSS

**Fig. 37** – Archway southbound (1926)

SOUTHBOUND TRAINS		
	VIA CHARING +	
	VIA BANK	

**Fig. 38** – Camden Town S/B – cross-passage (1972)

q55 PLATFORM 2 FIRST TRAIN MORDEN KENNINGTON VIA BANK VIA CHARING CROSS APPROACHING IN PLATFORM	q55 PLATFORM 2 SECOND TRAIN MORDEN KENNINGTON VIA BANK VIA CHARING CROSS APPROACHING IN PLATFORM	PLATFORM 4 55p FIRST TRAIN MORDEN KENNINGTON VIA BANK VIA CHARING CROSS APPROACHING IN PLATFORM	PLATFORM 4 55p SECOND TRAIN MORDEN KENNINGTON VIA BANK VIA CHARING CROSS APPROACHING IN PLATFORM
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Fig. 39 – Euston to Waterloo (Charing Cross branch) southbound (1926)

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
MORDEN	MORDEN	MORDEN
KENNINGTON	KENNINGTON	KENNINGTON
FOR MORDEN LINE CHANGE AT KENNINGTON		

Fig. 40 – Charing Cross southbound (1979)<sup>5</sup>

3	2	1	MORDEN
3	2	1	TOOTING BROADWAY
3	2	1	KENNINGTON
3	2	1	NOT IN SERVICE

Fig. 41 – Embankment southbound (1926)

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
MORDEN	MORDEN	MORDEN
KENNINGTON	KENNINGTON	KENNINGTON
TRAIN APPROACHING	FOR MORDEN LINE CHANGE AT KENNINGTON	

Fig. 42 – Kennington (Charing Cross branch) southbound (1926)

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
MORDEN	MORDEN	MORDEN
STOPS HERE	STOPS HERE	STOPS HERE

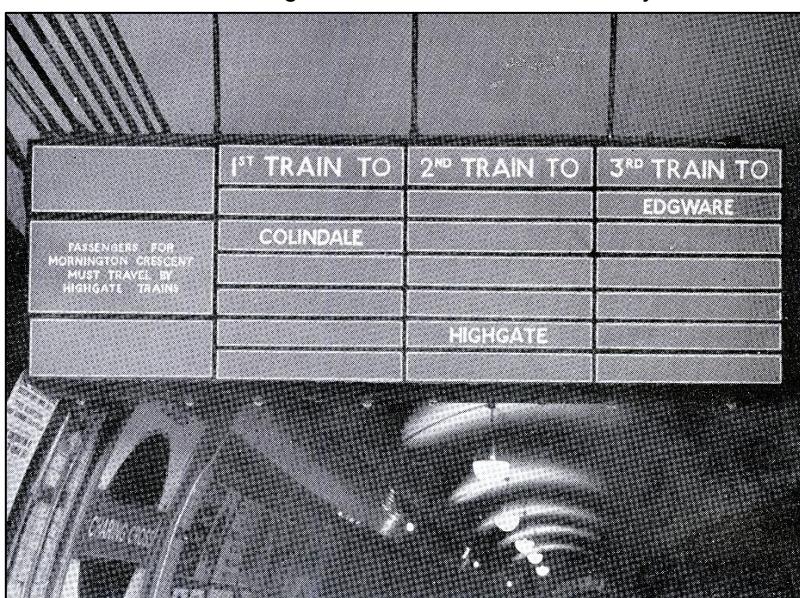
## STATIONS WITHOUT INDICATORS:

### NORTHBOUND

Borough, Brent Cross, Burnt Oak, Colindale, Hendon Central, Highgate, Kennington (Bank branch), Kentish Town, Totteridge & Whetstone, Tufnell Park, West Finchley, Woodside Park.

### SOUTHBOUND

Angel, Balham, Bank, Borough, Clapham Common, Clapham North, Clapham South, Colliers Wood, Elephant & Castle, Euston (Bank branch), Kennington (Bank branch), King's Cross, London Bridge, Mill Hill East, Moorgate, Old Street, Oval, South Wimbledon, Stockwell, Tooting Bec, Tooting Broadway, Totteridge & Whetstone, West Finchley, Woodside Park. It is believed that Totteridge & Whetstone, West Finchley and Woodside Park at one time had 'finger boards'<sup>6</sup>.



**Left:** Charing Cross (now Embankment) northbound in the 1920s, showing the 4-column indicator in original condition. Only Highgate trains stopped at Mornington Crescent, a situation that continued through to October 1966.

**Photo:** LURS collection

**Below:** A 3-column 1926 design at Hampstead southbound.



**Left:** Embankment southbound with a 1926 3-stack

<sup>5</sup> Originally lettered KENNINGTONON in error. See photograph in Jubilee Line Supplement to *Underground News* No.210, June 1979, page 166.

<sup>6</sup> Finger boards were manually displayed by station staff during rush hours, when trains ran via both Charing Cross and Bank. During off-peak times, all trains on the Barnet branch then ran via Charing Cross.



indicator. Additional information – i.e. 'ALL TRAINS GO TO WATERLOO' – is carried on a lower panel rather than a fourth column. Note also that 'TRAIN APPROACHING' is illuminated, which came on as a train left Strand (today's Charing Cross).

Both photos: Brian Hardy



**Above:** Golders Green northbound platform 2. Above Edgware were Colindale and Hendon, the latter being superfluous from 1930, having been made redundant by a siding at Colindale.

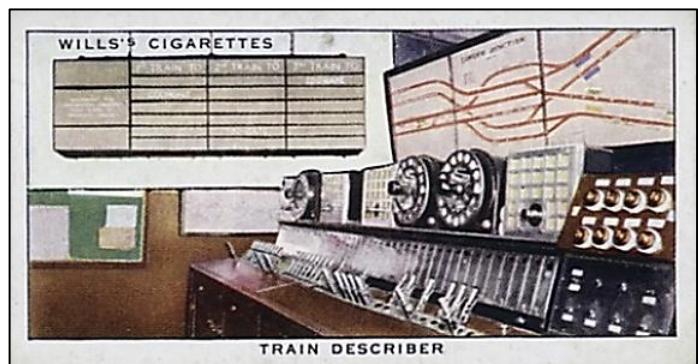
**Photo:** Kim Rennie

**Right:** Clapham North with a 1926 3-column type. The third column here is used to show a permanent sign, in this case that passengers for the Charing Cross branch should change at Kennington when no through train is shown.

**Photo:** LURS Collection



**Above:** The 1926 3-column sign at Colindale southbound in 1971. The information panels on the left reflects the service at that time of day (which were manually controlled by switches), the top telling passengers to change at Kennington for stations to Morden (all Charing Cross branch trains terminated at Kennington) and the middle one telling passengers to change at Golders Green for City trains (the City service in off-peak times terminated at Golders Green).



**Above:** Rotary describer equipment and a platform indicator as featured on a 1930s Wills' cigarette card.

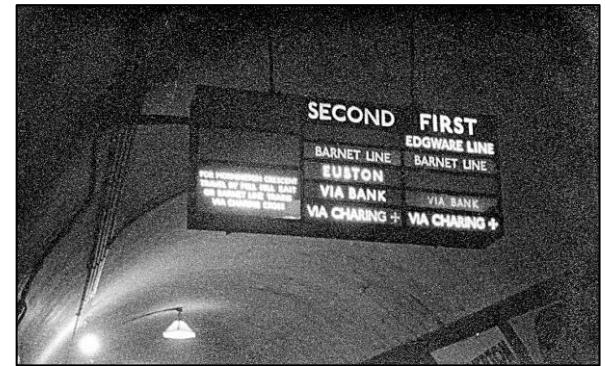
*Photo: Tom Burnham (Above, Left) and LURS Collection (Below)*



**Left:** Euston northbound (Charing Cross branch) looking south. The fourth column advises that 'For Brent, Hendon, Colindale, Burnt Oak & Edgware, change at Golders Green' and 'For Mill Hill East travel by Barnet train and change at Finchley Central'.

**Below:** (Left) Leicester Square northbound looking south before the 1935 retiling. Today's Archway station, then a terminus, was known as Highgate until 11 June 1939 when it was renamed Archway (Highgate). The suffix was dropped in December 1947. Passengers for Mornington Crescent had to travel on Highgate trains (q.v.).

**Below:** South Wimbledon northbound. The photographer's time-exposure has resulted in several displays being captured in a single image. The third column advises that 'For Mornington Crescent, travel by Mill Hill East or Barnet Line trains via Charing Cross'.



**Overleaf:** Camden Town southbound Barnet branch platform 4 in the early-1980s with both the 1926 indicator and a first generation dot-matrix sign in operation together.

*Photo: Brian Hardy*



**Above:** Edgware platforms 3 & 2 (originally 2 & 1) in the 1950s. The 1924 indicator is still in situ, but with amended displays to accommodate the extension of services to Morden in 1926.

It is interesting to note that while it was possible for signalmen (as they were then) to describe southbound trains via the route and destination, only Kennington or Morden was displayed. This is highlighted in the photo, in that the old indicator shows the train as going to Morden, whereas the new dot matrix indicator shows its actual destination of Tooting (Broadway). It was also possible for regulators to distinguish between Morden, Morden Depot, Kennington Loop and Kennington Siding trains, but not for passengers.

**Photo:** LT Museum