

HIDDEN LONDON

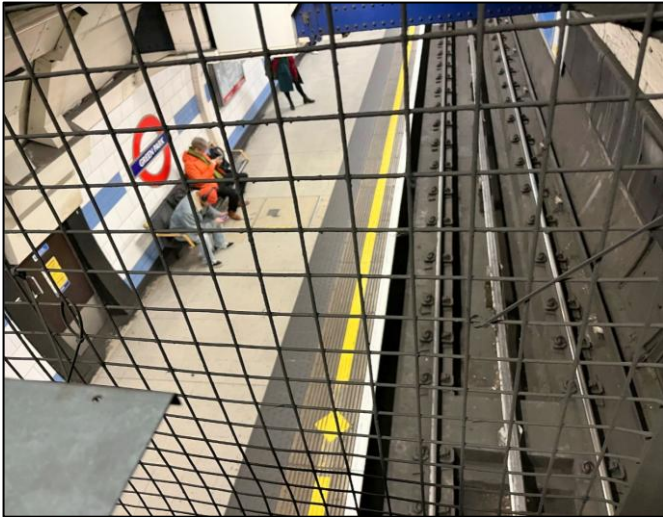
DOVER STREET : ALIGHT HERE FOR GREEN PARK

by Roger Tuke

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In October 2024, LTM Hidden London released details of and priority booking for their newest tour of what was Dover Street station, better known now as today's Green Park station. I reserved a place on this tour in its first week for mid-morning on 23 January 2025.

The tour group were met by three Hidden London guides Eesa, Tommy, and to keep us all safe, Bev in Green Park itself, by what is termed the "Buckingham Palace Gate" entrance/exit to Green Park station by the Diana Fountain. Once the usual formalities were completed, we were led through this entrance from the park to the south side of Piccadilly, opened in 2012 as part of the step-free programme works, on and through the gateline and down the escalator to the Piccadilly Line westbound platform and through a door into the disused lift passageways, where we had the station's outline history explained.



Looking down at the eastbound Piccadilly Line platform (Top, Left) and with much of the light blue and white tiling still remaining, including the original direction signs (Above, Left). The lower lift landing is seen (Above, Right).

Dover Street station opened on 15 December 1906 as part of the Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton Railway, (today's Piccadilly Line) between Finsbury Park and Hammersmith, part of Charles Tyson Yerkes' Underground Electric Railways Company of London group. The original Leslie Green designed station building was in Dover Street situated on its eastern side, to the north side of Piccadilly opposite The Ritz Hotel, Dover Street being one stop west of Piccadilly Circus station and before Down Street station further west along Piccadilly. It was a one of 46 stations built by UERL on the three Yerkes' lines and had the typical red oxblood terracotta cladding with two lift shafts, each containing two lifts, although only two lifts were installed by opening date – soon after we were told this situation was remedied. (A third was added later – Ed.). At the base of the lift shafts were two separate passageways leading from or to the lifts under the Dover Street roadway above, passing over one of the Piccadilly Line platforms to two sets of central stairs onto the platforms, allowing a one-way system for foot traffic to be implemented. In addition there was a single stair shaft.

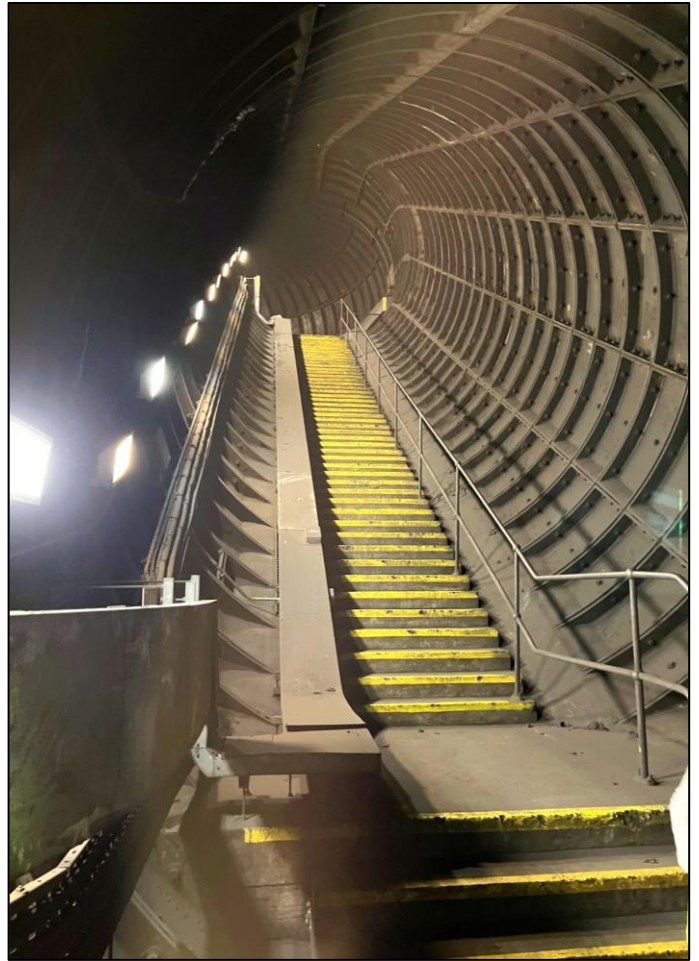
By the early-1930s, Dover Street was an increasingly busy station, whereas several others on the Piccadilly Line were underused. This led to the rebuilding of Dover Street by Charles Holden, the new building being on Piccadilly to the west of the original station opposite Green Park itself. It was completed on 18 September 1933 with escalators and was renamed Green Park at the same time. Both Down Street and York Road stations closed in 1932, with Brompton Road following in 1934, from the seven stations considered for closure at the time. Nothing remains of the street level Dover Street station building today, it being demolished in the 1960s and redeveloped again since.

We were then taken through a gate into the disused passageways. Here, most of the original light blue, white and cream tiling remains, with 'to the lifts' and 'to the trains' signage, complete with directional arrows. From a few areas where tiling was missing, the backing pattern clearly marks this station as one tiled by W.B. Simpson & Sons.

We then had the wartime use of the disused passageways and lift shafts explained. Initially, they were used to house valuable art items from museums, but these were relocated to other disused areas at other stations to free up space for a more important role between 1941 and 1945, namely the use by the London Transport Executive Board, allowing it to safely meet during air raids and helping ensure London's public transport to continue to function. We were shown a detailed plan of how the spaces were repurposed into offices, a typing pool area, telephone exchange, meeting room, bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchen complete with a smaller new lift in the former stair shaft (the former lifts having been by then removed) to the street level building which by then had become an Express Dairies café. This had been leased following the station's relocation and apparently Express Dairies were not best pleased by being told to vacate, taking LT to court and obtaining compensation. Again, we were informed by a recording that initially serious consideration was given to housing the LT Executive Board in the disused York Road station, but the proximity to 55 Broadway, Parliament, press offices, more difficult and lengthy road access to York Way and the fact that the Chairman Lord Ashfield resided in Mayfair, all contributed to the wartime use of the former Dover Street station for the Executive. It should also be borne in mind that the Air Ministry were housed in nearby Brompton Road and the Railway Executive Committee in adjacent Down Street closed stations. We saw evidence of the class distinction between Directors/Heads of Department and other employees, reflected in executive dining room for example which together with the Chairman's bedroom had walls treated with finer materials, skirting boards remaining on view, original tiling removed, whereas in the employees areas the original Dover Street tiling was left untouched and still remains visible today.

After exploring and hearing about the wartime uses and exiting past the lift shafts via the other disused passageway used by engineers and cleaning contractors for storage, we were led back up the escalators to the mid-level landing and the long connecting passageway dating from more recent station developments. Initially this involved the arrival of the Victoria Line, opening on 7 March 1969, observing modern light blue and white tiling, but still trying to match in with the original colour scheme. On the other hand, the Jubilee Line areas brought vivid orange tiling to the station. We were then led through a door into the first of two huge ventilation shafts, this giving views down through grilles onto the northbound Victoria Line platform and track area. We had the history of the Victoria Line briefly explained and some clips from a 1960s documentary charting the background to the building of the Victoria Line and its formal opening. The first fully automated Metro railway in the World with today having the most efficient service in the peaks of a train every 90 seconds. (*Timetabled every 100 seconds – 1m 40sec – Ed*).

Having viewed the Victoria Line, we were taken down a level to reach the Jubilee Line, initially named the Fleet Line when the central section between Baker Street and Charing Cross was built in the 1970s. In this ventilation shaft, the tunnel lining rings (*Below, Left*) clearly bore the dates of either 1972 or 1973 with the maker's name S&S-E, (Stanton & Staveley Engineering). The background to the Jubilee Line was explained, opening on 1 May 1979, its subsequent extension onto Waterloo, Canary Wharf to Stratford in 1999 together with abandonment of the Green Park to Charing Cross section for regular service. We were able to look down through grilles onto the southbound Jubilee Line platform and track. We then went to the front of this platform and were led into another ventilation area with tunnel lining rings dated 1973 leading to an incredible curving upwards vertical shaft that rises on to Blue Ball Yard, in St. James' area south of Piccadilly behind the Ritz. The stairs (*Below*) lead to the Jubilee Line ventilation tunnels.



The guides were thanked for a most informative tour and we were then led back up the escalators to the ticket hall, through the gateline where to the right by the lifts installed near to the Green Park entrance there are public toilets. Many of the tour party visited if only to wash their hands from what are probably some of the dirtiest areas of any of the Hidden London tours that I've enjoyed to date