

# KENSINGTON (ADDISON ROAD/OLYMPIA) CINDERELLA OR SLEEPING BEAUTY?

by Eric Stuart

Brian Hardy has given us an excellent review of the electric days on this line until the 1950s or so and then the Olympia shuttle, but perhaps I could be allowed to give some further details and bring the picture up-to-date.

In the early days of London steam suburban railways, it seems the various companies were trying to use every piece of track to serve everywhere. Some of these services were ephemeral in the extreme, lasting but a few months. One example was a service from Broad Street to Moorgate, via north, west and south London, finally arriving at Moorgate by the third side of the triangle at Farringdon.

Addison Road was very much involved in many of these services, some of which have already been mentioned in the previous articles. Briefly, there were –

- The Outer and Middle Circles, which were originally steam. The Outer changed between steam and electric locomotives at Earl's Court for a while, but later, as electric services, they were cut back severely until finishing in 1940 in the forms previously mentioned (see *Underground News* No.624, pages 654-655).
- Then there were the services over the main West London and West London Extension Railways between Willesden Junction and Clapham Junction, with some trains extended beyond those points.
- A couple of additional services through Addison Road were the LSWR trains between Clapham Junction/Waterloo and Richmond/Twickenham via the curve from the WLR through Shepherd's Bush (LSWR), Hammersmith (Grove Road) and then onto what is now the District and Piccadilly before reaching the (then) four-platform station at Gunnersbury. These two services were each hourly for some years, providing a core half-hourly service.

With the spread of tram routes and then underground lines, many of the services were undermined by more frequent and direct alternatives and began to fade away. The Richmond/Twickenham service went in 1916 and the residual services through Addison Road finished in 1940. Addison Road then fell into a slumber for about 50 years awaiting a "Price Charming" (well, this was written in the panto season!).

There were some stirrings over the years.

After the Second World War, the service between Olympia (as it now was) and Clapham Junction was revived, albeit a skeletal service of four trains each way, Sundays excepted – but the trains travelled non-stop. The service was primarily for civil servants, although any passengers could use it. But it normally ran unadvertised and largely un-noticed. To make it more difficult to find, for many years half the trains used platform 1 at Clapham Junction and the other half platform 17. The Saturday service did not last. For enthusiasts, it was of great interest in the variety of coaching stock and locomotives used over the years. Push-pull vehicles turned up and, for some time, the train included BR's only glass-fibre bodied coach, S1000. It became the last steam inner-suburban service in London, finishing with the end of SR steam in 1967, outlasting the North Woolwich trains by about five years. Latterly, class 33 diesels hauled the trains and I believe "Thumper" DEMUs and Electro-diesels had turns. The last motive power before electrification was a Class 117 DMU, by which time the train had become known as the "Kenny Belle". An friend told me of one evening, when he was boarding the train home at Olympia, an old lady approached the driver to ask if the (steam!) train was heading for Earl's Court!

From the early 1900s, another train passing through Addison Road was the famous "Sunny South Express", with portions between the South Coast resort stations on the LBSCR and LNWR stations in the West Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool. The NRM maintains that this train ran until after the Second World War. In fact, its heyday was then long past. It's true that many trains ran through from the north of England to the South Coast Resorts on Saturdays, some through Olympia, but the "Sunny South Express" as such had expired probably in the inter-war period. As an un-named train, it was revived for a few years (approximately 1979 – 2008) but then was dropped again. The Stirling – Newhaven car-sleeper also passed that way.

However, the station has also had other moments of transient glory. In the mid-1960s, there was the stop:go hiatus over the re-building of Euston for the (then) proposed electrification. Because of governmental dilly-dallying, the disruption to the station was extended. Trains that had previously been run to and from Euston were diverted to alternative London termini, such as Marylebone, St. Pancras, Paddington and Kensington Olympia. To aid travellers, a limited service of District Line trains ran to Olympia to connect with them, if an exhibition service was not in operation. The diverted trains to Olympia began on 1 April 1963 and continued until 1965. We are told that from 15 June 1965 the overnight sleeping trains would once again serve Euston and so the District Line service to Olympia was discontinued (apart from exhibitions). The times of the District Line trains to Olympia varied with changes to the times of main line services.

BR later used Olympia as their main London Motorail terminal but, of course, no connecting LT rail service was needed for such trains.

When Paddington main line station was being re-signalled a couple of years later, trains were terminated at Ealing Broadway, Marylebone and Olympia. LT once again provided a rail service to Olympia from 15 October 1967 through to 10 November 1967. The District Line service operated from about 06.30 to 22.30 Mondays to Saturdays but only a very limited service was provided on Sundays. Part of the work at Paddington involved segregating the Hammersmith & City Line from the Western Region, where platforms 15 and 16 became used solely by LT trains and platforms 13 and 14 by main line suburban services. Previously, all four platforms were electrified and could be used by LT or Western Region trains.

Whilst many European cities were appreciating the advantages of cross-city 'heavy' rail lines, where they did not already have them, London was rather late in having such services across the centre. BR eventually introduced Thameslink, using the City Widened Lines, followed by the Silverlink service through Olympia. Since then, of course, we have seen the burgeoning of such lines, on the North, East, South and West London lines, including the service that originally ran from Watford Junction to Brighton and currently from Milton Keynes to Croydon. At least one LURS member hopes to see some of these trains extended between to the South Coast and the West Midlands – a new "Sunny South Express".

The station layout has been simplified, with the north-eastern and south-eastern bays no longer there. Also, the southbound platform is now where the southbound platform road was, trains using what was the southbound through road. The station now is probably as busy as it has ever been, albeit that the choice of destinations is not quite as great as once it was. Essentially, the West London/West London Extension and Outer Circles are back with modifications. Perhaps one could say the situation has come Full Circle – if one can forgive the Berlinesque pun!