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THE VICTORIA LINE ARRIVES

At last, after years of proposals and planning, more, wasted, years while LT were persuading a stupid and shortsighted Ministry of Transport to give permission to go ahead, and finally five years of building, the Victoria Line has arrived. The first stage, from Walthamstow to Highbury and Islington, was opened without any form of ceremony on the morning of Sunday 1st September 1968.

The opening passed off without any untoward incidents; many of those travelling on the first train were enthusiasts, others were local inhabitants trying out their new commuter route, and yet more were LT and contractors officials and workers; in fact it would be interesting to know how many passengers were on that first train merely because they wanted to get from Point A to Point B - probably not more than 20 out of a complement of between 3/400.

Prior to the opening, an Exhibition had been put on at the Design Centre in London's Haymarket, which gave a very good idea of the general arrangement and working system to be used on the line. Perhaps by accident, or maybe as an indication of the probable position on the Line itself, this Exhibition was not properly completed by the time of the press preview on 20th August. However, it was finished very soon after, and it is only to be expected that the remaining work on the Line will be dealt with equally quickly.

Timetable running commenced on Monday, 26th August, but some difficulty was met in keeping this up because of minor snags in track and train equipment. For the opening day a special

timetable was in force, there was a special holiday timetable for the next day - the Summer Bank Holiday - and the normal timetables did not come into force until Tuesday, 3rd September. Opening Day trains commenced from Walthamstow Central at 07.32½, with a regular service at 7½ minute intervals until 21.30 then continued as the normal published timetables until close of traffic - the last train being the 23.24 ex Walthamstow.

Another precursor of the Line was a six-page pamphlet entitled "The Victoria Line - London's New Tube" with a fair amount of text-matter describing the Line, the automatic trains, and instructing passengers how to use the automatic barriers. It also includes an interesting route diagram of the whole Underground system in black and white, but with the Victoria Line from Walthamstow to Highbury in blue and the rest of the line, including the Brixton extension, shown dotted in black and showing the recently-authorised Pimlico station. There is also a Victoria Line diagram spread across the foot of two pages, while a timetable and a fares table completes the picture. In addition, a new edition of the small booklet entitled "The Victoria Line" has been published, which is both informative and interesting; a new symbol, the bar-and-circle device with a V behind and Victoria Line on the bar has appeared - this is illustrated on p.153, superimposed on a map of the whole line.

Enough of the preliminaries; on opening day there were up to fifty would-be passengers present by 06.40, something like 100 at 07.15, and more later. Passengers were not allowed to go beyond the subsurface concourse and so down the stairs or escalators until about 07.25. The train ran near enough to time - precise timing cannot be given because your reporter was too bleary-eyed to be sure that he had set his watch correctly, and the station clocks, while working, were nearly all telling the wrong time by several hours.

The journey down to Highbury was uneventful, and was obviously enjoyed by the enthusiasts present. The writer then proceeded back to Walthamstow by means of a tour of inspection alighting at every station en route. The warnings about the finishing-off not being completed were obviously necessary, as will be seen from what follows.

There had been some doubt as to whether the whole of the section planned for opening would, in fact, open, due to moisture in the tunnels affecting the signalling equipment, but round-the-clock work was rewarded - some 380 yards of rails north of Seven Sisters being lifted, and pads inserted under the chairs, a few hours before the first trains ran over the track.

No automatic barriers were working at any station; Seven Sisters and Tottenham Hale appeared to be the nearest to completion at platform level (the clocks were right at Seven Sisters!), but strangely enough these two were the least advanced at street level - Seven Sisters only having one access to the Booking Hall open. Tottenham Hale had obviously been set back by the serious fire which occurred in the Booking Hall there in July, the brickwork showing signs of scorching in some places.

Incidentally, Seven Sisters has one southbound platform, numbered 1, and two northbound platforms, respectively numbered 3 and 4. Does anybody know what has happened to 2?

All escalators on the line are two-speed with the magic-eye device, which increases the speed of running as soon as someone steps on to it, keeping the higher speed up long enough for the passenger to reach the top, whereupon it reverts to the slower rate of running unless someone else has stepped on in the meantime.

At Walthamstow Central (formerly known as Hoe Street by BR), all the booking office appears to be in the charge of British Railways; access to the Victoria Line is via the BR platforms, and steps leading down therefrom to the sub-surface concourse from which the escalators run down to platform level. There will be no automatic barriers installed at this station, but there is to be a bus station, flanking the down BR track outside the station entrance on the down side. Bus services are being remodelled in the Walthamstow area to act as feeders to the new tube, and the first changes took place the week after the opening of the line, but the bus station was nowhere near completed by that date.

With effect from 1st September, to coincide with the

opening of the Victoria Line, the special coach service from Finsbury Park to Drayton Park, serving the displaced passengers of the Northern City Line who lost their trains when that section was taken for the Victoria Line, has been withdrawn. These passengers are now expected to go by tube and change at Highbury and Islington - which is only a logical development. Incidentally, the latest, Victoria Line, diagram of lines in the pamphlet referred to above, shows the Northern City Line terminating at Drayton Park - not at Finsbury Park with a note to indicate the coach service, as has been the case hitherto.

First impressions? Good on the whole; when everything is obviously new, smells of wet cement and paint, and is not completed anyway, it is difficult to be quite sure - but the general impression given by the stations is of lightness and spaciousness - except in some of the cross-passages for pedestrians at some stations, which appear to be very low-ceilinged, and one or two escalator shafts also give the same impression. Generally, though it is fairly safe to say that, when everything has been tidied up, cleaned up and, more especially, finished, the line will be greatly to the credit of LP's Architects and Designers. Certainly it can be said that LP has continued the good work begun long ago (when it was very unusual) of designing everything in one scheme.

Train running was comfortable, but with braking seeming to be a little fiercer than is usual with manual operation, and also a little jerky at times. Also, despite the "sound-barriers" running along all tunnels below the car floor level (on each side of the tunnel affixed to the lining) the noise-level is slightly higher than would have been expected from LP's previous announcements on this subject. But these are only minor complaints, and do not detract from the general pleasant travelling conditions.

One other point of interest is that the suicide pits are of a new design; they occupy the full width between the running rails as usual, and are the normal depth for two-thirds of their width; but, for the remaining third - that nearest the platform - they drop down to a trough about two feet deeper than the rest of the pit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

5th July 1968

Dear Sir,

The appeal for new members has prompted me to make my own review of Society activities, as an out-of-London member, so see what a prospective new out-of-London member has to look forward to. Nothing but praise is due to the hard-working Committee; there are regular London meetings for those near enough; excellent decentralised meetings held occasionally such as those at Pinner; a potentially good journal, and little else.

When Alan Jackson was installed as President he said a few wise words suggesting that members should meet informally at each other's houses; these seemed to be grand opportunities for fruitful exchange of LT information among members for mutual and general benefit. This sound counsel led me to arrange a series of three annual displays of relics in my garden as part of Society fixtures in this area. The results were most disappointing; new contacts? exchange of information? Absolutely nil. Members seem unwilling to write or phone unless they want information, relics or favours; having got what they want (usually without acknowledgement) the correspondence is dropped like a hot potato. If one writes first, even offering free relics, or enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, there is usually no reply. On several occasions recently I could have helped members with their collections, but having no contacts, have reluctantly allowed relics to go to other societies. By the way - our Curator says that some of the collections "are of considerable size" - when are we going to see them?

Another point - the Journal. Several times I have tried to recruit new members by showing them the Journal, but it is usually been laughed at. Looking through this year's issues I counted about 29 pages of good technical articles and news, but no less than 47 pages of reprinted matter, stale news, comment, talk, talk, and more talk. Surely a Journal such as ours should consist largely of members' observations? Not all members can regularly

patrol the entire LT system to inspect developments, so where are the news flashes about the activities of the remaining panniers; changes to service stock; the new LT arrow; details of lettering on Victoria Line cars; new station colour schemes for modellers' benefit; layout of new car parks? Let us have fewer news flashes about drunken motormen; fisticuffs; letters to the paper; what ex-Chairmen wrote in other magazines; government appointments and Mrs Brown of Edgware dropping her handbag on the Northern Line escalator; NO whole pages utterly wasted on Orgy posters; but a better balance each month with the amount of space devoted to each type of item severely restricted.

A better Journal, more members; more members, more money, a better Journal, and so on.

Any comments?

Yours sincerely,

16 Nightingale Road,
Southcourt,
Aylesbury, Bucks.

A.J.Reed

Editor's Note Letters such as the above are more than welcome; there is remarkably little criticism of the Journal in the postbag, and, with far more material available than it is possible to print, readers' guidance on what to select is very useful. As Mr Reed says, any comments? (Incidentally, the reprints so disparagingly referred to above are very popular - judging by the number of recent suggestions, received from a number of sources, for further items to be similarly reproduced!)

MAP REVIEW

Paul E. Garbutt; UNDERGROUND Diagram of Lines and Station Index; London Transport, 1968; free.

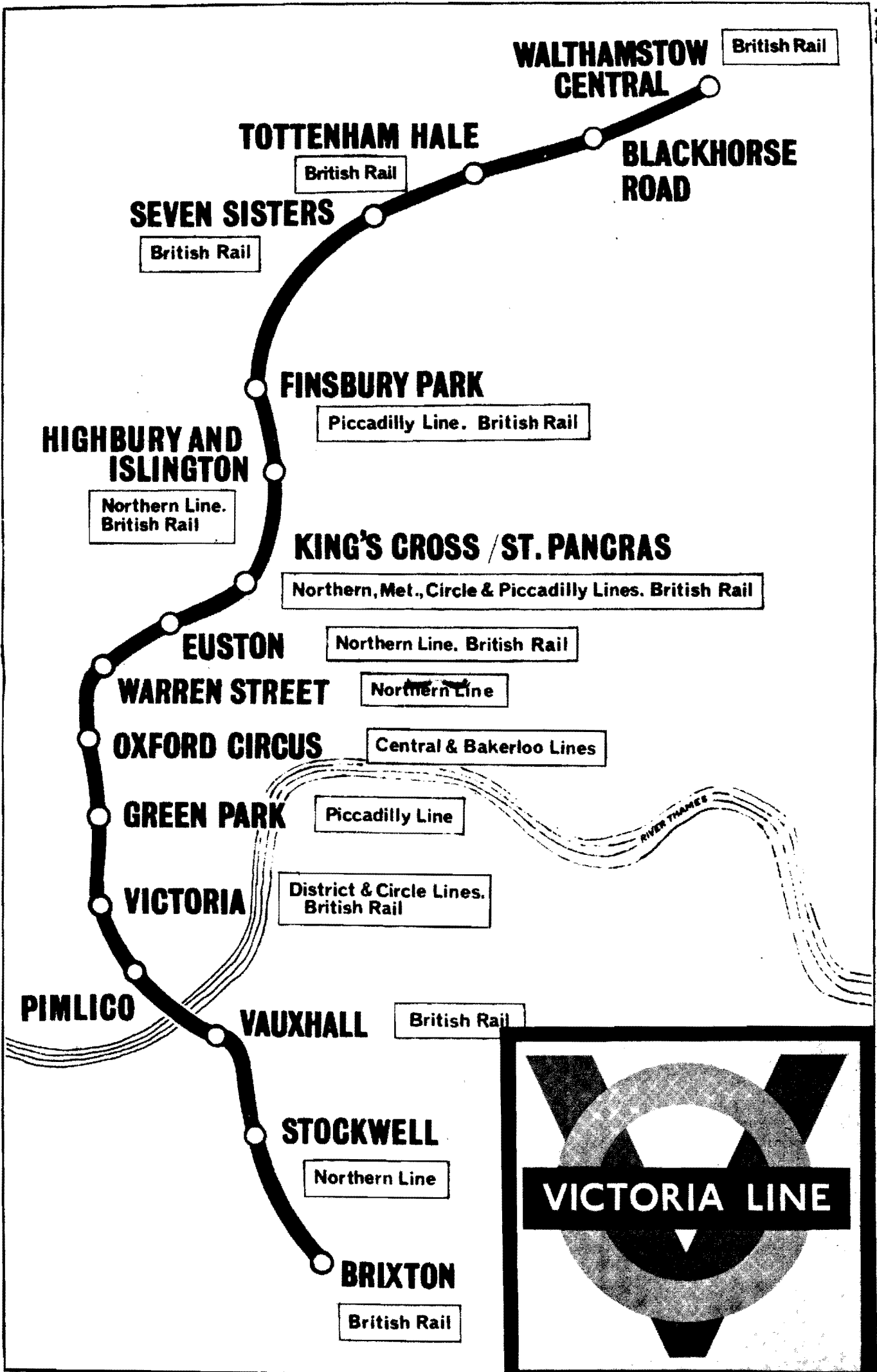
Another new version of the Underground map has been issued. Unlike its predecessor, it bears little resemblance to what has gone before. The general layout is the same as its predecessor (reference - date 867) but much detail is changed. The reference for the new map is 168/167Z/750,000. The "blue ribbon" design on the

cover and back of the map showing bullseye symbols alternately solid white (pointing north-east and outline (pointing north-west) has been replaced by a series of separate blue squares containing the alternate white and outline bullseyes, which now all point east-west. Another difference is that the word "underground" has lost its age-old large capitals for first and last letters. LT's phone number is shown in its all-figure form, and unlike the 867 map, there is a date on the cover - "No. 1 - 1968". Further issues are expected later in the year as the Victoria Line opens.

So much for the cover. On the back, and on the map itself, the type used is very slightly smaller, a difference which is sufficient to cause eye-strain to users. The coloured route lines are narrower (has LT reduced its track-gauge to 3'6"?); the blue grid lines are in different positions and thicker; together with the station names, the grid dominates the map, having the effect of making the route diagram itself appear spidery. The old map was dominated by coloured lines in all directions, but the new one seems to be largely pointing left to right, as the station names run that way. The map itself is slightly smaller, but the central area has been enlarged; thus, the stations outside the Circle Line are cramped together, while many ugly gaps have been left inside it. These alterations have presumably been made in order to make the map less confusing; in fact, they have made it ugly and hard to read.

Other changes include Bromley becoming Bromley-by-Bow; District and Circle Lines changing positions between Edgware Road and High Street Kensington, the District now appearing inside the Circle; Barons Court is shown as an interchange station; the black circles at some interchange stations have been rearranged; the Thames is narrower; and Oxford Circus, Green Park and Victoria stations are now shown directly in a straight line to provide for the Victoria Line when it is added.

Altogether, not a very satisfactory map, but obviously a stop-gap, altered to allow for the insertion of the new Victoria Line; it will soon be possible to judge the effectiveness of the changes on another new issue showing the new line.



THAMES TUNNELS

The conclusion of the chapter from "Under London; a Chronicle of London's Underground Life-lines and Relics" by F.L.Stevens and now reprinted by courtesy of J.M.Dent and Sons Limited, who originally published the book in 1939.

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If you would like to know more about London - especially that unknown London, Thames dockland - take a trip by car one summer evening to all the Thames tunnels in turn (not forgetting that they are at work on a new one between Dartford and Purfleet). From the roundhouse of the Tower subway you can make for Wapping. When you have looked in at the station there, climb down the old stone steps to the river, or eat hot saveloys in 'The Prospect of Whitby' while you watch the ships go by. It is not far from this point to Rotherhithe Tunnel, where two long parallel rows of lights make a wonderful pattern on the tiled walls. On the night of my trip I thought the glistening surface of the tunnel road looked rather like a swimming pool. The effect as we went through, of green traffic lights and the red lights of workmen, gave a touch of fantasy to what is a fine clean piece of engineering.

Rotherhithe Tunnel was opened in 1908, and cost the London County Council a little over a million and a half pounds. It was designed, and its construction supervised, by the Council's chief engineer, Sir Maurice FitzMaurice. He had the advantage of shields which thrust their way into the clay with the help of hydraulic power, the use of compressed air to keep back the water, and cast iron for the lining of the tunnel. So effective were these modern aids that, although only seven feet separated the tunnel's roof from the river bed, not once did the river break through. The part of the tunnel under the river was completed in nine months, as much as twelve and a half feet being quite frequently carried out in twenty-four hours.

There are, of course, quite long approaches to the tunnel on either side of the river. It would be a nuisance if a driver of a lorry found on reaching the tunnel that his load was too high to get through, so a gauge arch was placed at the entrances. It was a brilliant idea to use for this purpose the cutting edges of the two shields actually employed for building the tunnel.

These shields, by the way, weighed three hundred and eighty tons each, and were pushed forward by means of forty hydraulic rams with a total force of six thousand tons.

Brunel had no such powerful instruments to make his task easier. Engineers today marvel that the Thames Tunnel was ever finished. In these days the anxiety that haunted Brunel is greatly lessened, for tunnel builders can employ compressed air as an invisible wall to hold back the water. The compressed air, however, has to be used with extreme care and judgment. Any excessive pressure at the wrong moment may blow men out through the river with the force of an explosion. Such miscalculations are not likely in these days, but they have happened in the past. I remember a very experienced tunnel worker telling me of three men who were blown from a tunnel, through the river, and many feet into the air. One of the men actually survived.

Men working in compressed air have first to pass through an 'air lock', in which the pressure is gradually raised. Their spell of duty over, they have to go through the opposite process. Any sudden change from the high pressure sometimes necessary for under-river tunnelling would lead to painful, and possibly fatal, attacks, known as 'the bends'.

If you decide to make a tour of the Thames tunnels, your next call after Rotherhithe will be the Greenwich subway for foot passengers, completed in 1902. The entrance seems to have been designed in the style of the Observatory, and the lift will carry as many as sixty people on the first part of their under-river journey to the Isle of Dogs, where the gardens on the housing estate are a picture. This is the London that most of us never see. It more than repays a visit, for it carries the magic character of a dream in which everything is familiar yet is tinged with fantasy.

On to Blackwall Tunnel, the archway of which is a kind of smaller Tower Bridge. It connects the East India Dock Road at Poplar with East Greenwich, is more than a mile long, and is to be duplicated by a new Blackwall Tunnel, which will run parallel to, and about eight hundred feet on the downstream side of, the existing tunnel. South-bound traffic (and no pedestrians) only will be allowed to use the new tunnel.

An order for trial borings was placed in 1939, the

Jubilee Year of the London County Council, and it is interesting to note that the first Blackwall Tunnel brought the Council into existence ten days earlier than Parliament had anticipated. What happened was this: The first London County Council was elected on 17th January 1889. It was to act as a provisional Council until 1st April 1889, and then become the London County Council proper. Meanwhile, its predecessor, the Metropolitan Board of Works, continued in power. On 15th March 1889 the Board of Works considered tenders for constructing a tunnel at Blackwall, and decided to accept one, in spite of appeals from the Provisional London County Council and from the Local Government Board that it should not take action which would bind its successor in a matter of such importance. The Board then adjourned until 22nd March, but it had not sealed the contract and it never met again.

The Provisional London County Council met on 19th March and decided to ask the Local Government Board to fix the 21st March as the day on which the Council proper should come into being. This was agreed to by the Board on the same day, and thus, two days later, on 21st March 1889, the London County Council held its first meeting, and the Metropolitan Board of Works ceased to exist.

The interesting point about the construction of the first Blackwall Tunnel is that, for some distance, it was driven within five feet of the river bed. As the intervening ground was coarse gravel, it was necessary to use extra precautions for the men's safety. To lessen the possibility of the water's breaking through, a layer of clay ten feet thick and one hundred and fifty feet wide was deposited from barges on the bed of the Thames over the line of the tunnel.

I learn from the booklet used for the opening ceremony in 1897 that the face of the tunnelling shield was kept quite open when working in clay, but when in gravel it was almost completely closed by iron shutters. For several weeks during which work was going on under the middle of the river, all the excavated matter was taken out through small handholes in size only seven inches by three inches.

Here are a few extra facts about the Blackwall Tunnel: it is as long as from Charing Cross to St Paul's, the

gradients of the approaches are approximately the same as that of the Haymarket, five hundred thousand tons of earth were excavated, and seven million bricks and a million white glazed tiles were used in its making.

The last calling place in our itinerary is Woolwich (although it will soon be possible to include the Dartford-Purfleet link, the pilot tunnel for which was completed in 1939. So accurate was the working, that when the men who had bored their way from both the Kent and Essex banks met the error in alignment was only three-eighths of an inch, and in the level only three-sixteenths of an inch!). Woolwich Tunnel was built, not in clay, but in chalk, in which were 'numerous fissures in free communication with the river'. Air pressure needed to keep the working face of the tunnel dry varied from eighteen to twenty-eight pounds to the square inch, according to the state of the tide. Despite the special hazard of building in chalk, a fair day's progress was eight and a half feet.

This tunnel trip is not easy unless you know London's dockland well. I recommend a map. On our first exploration we lost our way to Woolwich. But that only added to the fun. It seemed to us, released from the everyday routine of suburb and office, that this London was somewhere at the other end of the world. As the sun went down, we crossed between the Victoria Dock and the Royal Albert Dock, and saw over the house-tops the squat funnels of the liners. I almost forgot that I was looking for the Woolwich Tunnel, but it is easy enough to see - another big pillar-box marking the shaft to the subway which carries foot passengers under the ferry.

Of course, we took the ferry, surely one of the most fascinating free trips in the world. The ferry-boats are a bit like the show-boats of the American films. Each boat has two long, black funnels, one at each end, and they stick up above the riverside hoarding like tin whistles.

I shall not forget the look of the river on that warm summer evening - a picture in pastels, with points of sharp, gleaming light in red, green, and yellow. Woolwich itself, across the river, with its clock tower and dark hill behind, might easily have been a port in some far-off country - say New Zealand.

We had no trouble at all in getting our car on to the ferry, although two motor coaches, about a dozen other cars, and a score or so of bicycles had got there before us. Hundreds of youngsters, by the way, seem to spend their evenings cycling in this part of London's other world, and very naturally, for Greenwich pier may not be the seaside, but they are more than the next best thing.

That ferry-boat wastes no time, and seems to move without any effort at all. I watched a Thames Barge, with its brown canvas flying, go smoothly and silently by, and at a pretty good rate too. And so I finished up on deck, if it was only give minutes on a ferry, and gazed at the water in our wake churning into marbled froth, while, upstream, London was a jumble of dark masses amid the glow of many lights.

There is a fine escape for you on any summer evening. Try this tunnel trip. You can stop now and then to look at the river at night, not as one who is hurrying back to your suburb, but with the eye of a sailor ready to put out. You can, if you like, enjoy all the sweet sadness of parting, and then go comfortably home to bed. But I think you will have found something that will help you to understand that, without the river, there would have been no London.

SOCIETY NOTICES

Index 1967 The continued delay in producing the Index is regretted, but it is coming before long!

Programme 1969 The Committee are now planning the future programme, with particular reference to the early part of next year. Suggestions from members would be welcomed, as it is only by a constant flow of ideas from outside the Committee Room that the right balance of events can be arranged to suit the majority of members on the one hand, and to cater for the minorities on the other. Please help.

Ties Stocks of Society Ties are now getting very low; these may be obtained, price 12/6d each, post free, from the Sales Manager, R.B.Manley, at 35 Montholme Road, Battersea, London, S.W.11.

Photo Approval Service Members are reminded of the approval service now being tried out by our Photo Sales Manager, Ken Harris. Full details appear in the August issue, on p.124.

NEWS FLASHES

NF 787 Rumours are rife, but as yet unconfirmed, that the Metropolitan Line's Watford Branch may be linked up with British Railways' Croxley Green Branch at Croxley, with the intention of running a service from Baker Street to Watford Junction. Presumably Watford (Met) and Croxley (BR) stations would then be closed.

NF 788 The tube-style buffer stop at Rickmansworth Church Street - a relic of the working of the line by Joint Stock - was removed during July 1968 when the track was lifted on the now-closed branch.

NF 789 During the First Festival of London Stores, held between 20-5-1968 and 5-6-1968, London Transport issued special Shoparound Tickets at 2/6 for use in the West End after 10.00, but on the buses only; they were not available on the Underground. There was also an exhibition at Simpson's of Piccadilly of 300 years of transport in London.

NF 790 Availability of Red Rovers will, in future, be any day all through the year - but this will not apply to Twin Rovers. This seems strange; the objection to Rover Tickets during the week must surely be overcrowding at peak hours - yet the Underground can cope with a few more better than the buses. Can anyone throw any light on the reasons for this decision?

NF 791 As from the next fare revision by LT, it is understood that there will be an absolute maximum single fare of ten shillings. This will, of course, affect Green Line services mainly, but some Underground fares will come down to the new limit.

NF 792 On Sunday 21-7-1968 Aldwych station was used for shooting scenes of shelterers during the blitz for the new film "The Battle of Britain".

NF 793 A recent review of future applications of computers in the United Kingdom, conducted by International Computers and Tabulators Limited, predicts that complete computer control of the Underground system could be reached by 1975, is most likely to have come by 1979, and the latest likely date as 1987.

NF 794 Neasden Generating station closed on 21-7-1968; a brief history of the station will appear next month.

NF 795 Mill Hill East booking office was on fire 11-8-1968.

THE TIMETABLE

19.00 Thursday 3rd October Library Evening at 62
Devonshire Road, Ealing, London, W.5.

19.00 for 19.15 Friday 11th October The President's Address for 1968. The subject of Desmond F. Croome's Paper will be "Underground Railway Techniques - Yesterday and Today". With such a vast field to cover, Desmond Croome hopes to include design, construction and operation, with examples from both London and overseas. This meeting may well be expected to maintain the important position of the annual address from the Society's current President, and all our members are urged to attend and to bring their friends. The meeting will take place in Hammersmith Town Hall as usual.

Saturday 12th October Visit to Neasden Depot, London Transport. Those wishing to attend should send their names, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, to the Assistant Secretary, S.E. Jones, 113 Wandle Road, Morden, Surrey at once.

10.00 to 17.30 Sunday 20th October 1968 Stand at the Special Sunday Opening of the Museum of British Transport, Clapham, London, S.W.4. All members who possibly can come on this day are urged to do so; in view of the Government's determination to destroy this magnificent collection, it could prove to be the last time access is given to the public to board the exhibits before the lot is dispersed to the four corners of the earth - or to the scrapyards. Members may like to know also that, following the closure of the Museum at 17.30 on this day, there will be two performances of a Film Show, presented by A.G. Priestley under the title "Symphony in Steam", at the Classic Cinema, Stockwell (opposite Stockwell station (Northern Line)); performances are at 18.00 and 20.30. Prices of admission to the Museum Open Day are - Adults 5/-, Children 2/6d, while to the film show they are Adults 6/-, Children 4/6d. We shall sell film and tape at low prices.

19.00 Thursday 7th November Library Evening at 62
Devonshire Road, Ealing, London, W.5.

19.00 for 19.15 Friday 8th November at Hammersmith Town Hall. A paper will be presented by Cyril Smith, President of the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society on "The Bakerloo Line between the Wars".

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