

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

by Kim Rennie

A SHORT HISTORY OF UNDERGROUND SIGNS

3. NAME FRIEZES & PLATFORM NUMBERS

PLATFORM NAME FRIEZES

October 1937 saw a series of experimental continuous name friezes installed on the platforms at Tottenham Court Road. These carried the station name in black upper-case Johnston on white, interspersed with lined-out red & blue roundels, and with brown borders above and below. Initially made of paper, they were deemed a success and then installed in vitreous-enamel form both there and at Charing Cross [Embankment], Euston, Leicester Square, Strand, Warren Street and Waterloo.



Left: An experimental paper name frieze at Tottenham Court Road in 1937.

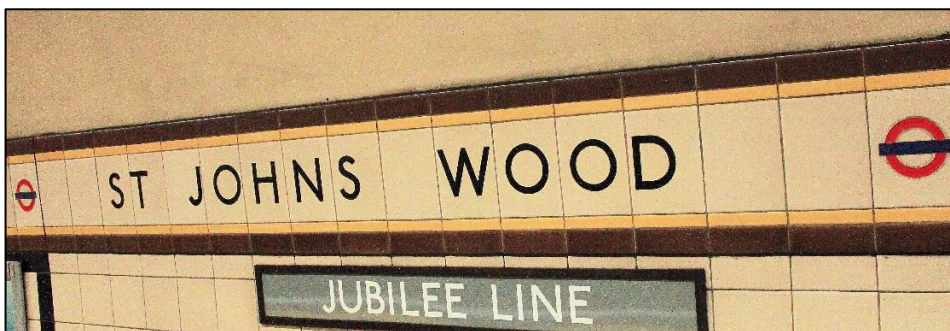
Above: A section of the first type of enamel platform frieze panel from 1937, with lined-out red & blue roundels and brown borders.

Both photos: Author's collection

The concept went a stage further in 1939, with ceramic name friezes provided on the new-build platforms at Baker Street (Bakerloo), St. John's Wood and Swiss Cottage; and later in the 1940s at Bethnal Green, Gants Hill, Highgate, King's Cross St. Pancras (Metropolitan) and Wanstead. There was also an incomplete installation at Redbridge, where the roundels were spaced appropriately on the frieze, but no lettered tiles provided.



Left: An example of the ceramic friezes introduced by Holden on the Bakerloo Line in 1939. A common tiling pattern was used at Swiss Cottage, St. John's Wood and Baker Street (since removed). Each station also had its own local identity colour, in this case green.



Left: St. John's Wood with a similar scheme to Swiss Cottage but with yellow relief. Note the lack of a possessive apostrophe in the station name, which was LT policy at the time. The plate below was originally lettered 'Bakerloo Line' in white-on-brown.

Opposite: (Top Left) The scheme at Bethnal Green was designed pre-war but not completed until 1946. Most tiling here was replaced by replicas in 2008 under the Metronet PPP refurbishment programme. The original red pigment was produced by a process using uranium.

Opposite: (Top Right) : Highgate opened in an incomplete state in 1941. The original platform and lower circulating area tiles survived until 2010 when they too were replaced by facsimiles under PPP.



Above: The unfinished 1947 platform frieze at Redbridge. Although most of the station was given new light pink tiling in the 1980s, the frieze area was left untouched and shows the blue relief colour originally chosen for this location.

In the 1950s, the continuous name frieze concept was expanded to encompass most deep-Tube, and some sub-surface level, stations. A new design was employed, again with black lettering on white, but with the borders in the line colour instead of dark brown. The roundels were now the same colour as the borders and carried the line title. On the Circle Line, which had only gained its yellow colour and separate identity in 1949, the 'Circle Line' roundels alternated with either 'District Line' or 'Metropolitan Line' versions, depending on the station's location, and the borders of these signs were green and yellow or maroon and yellow as appropriate. As in the 1930s, the initial application was usually in paper, with enamel versions following later, but in some cases, stations gained enamel friezes right from the start. The Piccadilly Line used a mid-blue colour at first, but when the Victoria Line adopted light blue (in place of the imperial purple originally chosen) replacement signs in a darker hue were provided at most sites.



Left: Euston Square has the last surviving full set of original 1950s/60s enamel platform friezes. Separate roundel types were needed on sections of the sub-surface railway where two lines served the same platform. The Circle Line version carried a black bar to aid legibility.



Left: The penultimate survivors of the 1950s/60s frieze pattern were at Holland Park, but replaced by replicas in 2016.



Left: A section of a mid-blue Piccadilly Line frieze on the disused Aldwych branch platform 5 at Holborn. The green area visible on one roundel is a leftover from commercial filming.



Left: Almost a complete set of 1950s/60s roundel spacer panels, which were sited between the repeated station name along the length of the frieze. The only version missing is a mid-blue version of the Piccadilly Line plate.

Photo:
Author's collection

For the new Victoria Line, the platform frieze idea was retained, but with white lettering and plain unlettered/unlined white roundels on a light blue background. Above this was a black strip which carried supplementary information such as directions to the

'WAY OUT', 'BRITISH RAIL' or to 'DISTRICT & CIRCLE LINES' etc. A new arrow was also introduced, which dispensed with the 'flights' and the circle. When the Piccadilly Line was extended to Heathrow Airport between 1975 and 1977, Hounslow West, Hatton Cross and Heathrow Central [Heathrow Terminals 1, 2, 3], (and later Heathrow Terminal 4), all had friezes developed from the Victoria Line, but with a dark blue background. A similar design was used on Stage 1 of the Jubilee Line in 1979, using a black-on-grey pattern, but clearly also derived from those on the Victoria Line. The combination of Strand and Trafalgar Square stations into a new Charing Cross in 1979 resulted in modern finishes being applied to the Bakerloo and Northern Line platforms. These were designed by David Gentleman and featured custom name friezes and murals.



Left: The Victoria Line frieze with its simple design, as installed 1968-1972 at all stations. These were progressively removed during the 2000s-2010s and replaced by the current corporate pattern.



Left: Piccadilly Line services were extended to Hatton Cross in 1975. The new sub-surface platforms there, and at Hounslow West (as seen here) had dark blue friezes developed from the Victoria Line pattern.



Left: Stage 1 of the Jubilee Line opened in 1979 and had its own style of platform frieze in grey. 'Way out' information etc. was originally carried on a yellow upper strip but has since been covered by more recent signage.



Above: The Northern Line combined frieze and murals at Charing Cross by David Gentleman featuring 'Northern Line' lettered roundels.



Above: The Bakerloo Line version by David Gentleman at Charing Cross where the roundels were left blank.

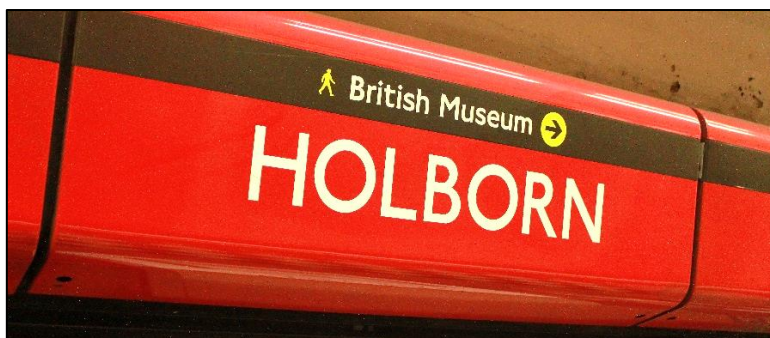
One policy developed in the 1970s was to move away from a uniform systemwide décor and develop instead individual themes that reflected the associations and activities of a station's locality. In addition, the increasing amounts of technology being fitted to platform areas was resulting in large amounts of unsightly wiring appearing in connection with new CCTV, public address, radio and signalling systems equipment etc. A number of central area stations thus gained large prominent cable management trunking systems (CMS), which also doubled-up as platform friezes. Examples included those fitted at Baker Street (Bakerloo) and Piccadilly Circus (Bakerloo) in brown; at Bond Street (Central), Holborn (Central), Marble Arch, Oxford Circus (Central), Tottenham Court Road (Central) in red; at Tottenham Court Road (Northern) in black; and at Finsbury Park (Piccadilly), Holborn (Piccadilly) and Piccadilly Circus (Piccadilly) in blue. In more recent years some of these CMS friezes been modified to adhere more closely to the current design standards, whilst a few have been removed completely (e.g. at Tottenham Court Road).



Left: A Bakerloo Line platform frieze and Cable Management System at Baker Street as installed circa-1979. The lettered areas have since been covered with more modern signage.

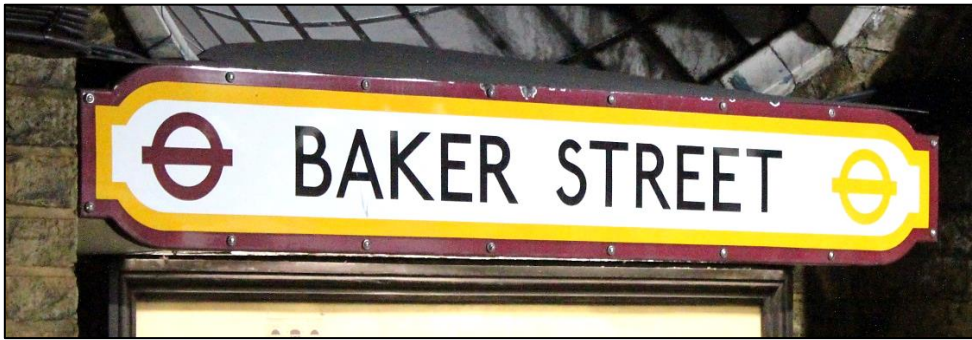


Left: Holborn was refurbished between 1985-89 and given combined CMS/platform friezes. Roundels were dispensed with and line identity indicated by the background colour. The 'Way out' information was originally shown on a yellow strip but is now obscured by later amendments.



Left: The red Central Line version of the joint CMS/platform frieze concept at Holborn. The 'walking man' pictogram and yellow, black & white direction information were all added later as part of the TFL 'Legible London' scheme launched in 2007

London Transport celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1983 and associated with this was the refurbishment of Baker Street's platforms 5 and 6. The work included a return to an approximation of the platforms' original 1860s appearance, with brickwork exposed and cleaned. Bespoke non-continuous frieze panels were designed for this location, and similar signs were fitted at Paddington (Circle) and Great Portland Street. All three sites have since had these signs replaced.



Left: Platforms 5 & 6 at Baker Street were refurbished in the early-1980s. New friezes were provided with unlettered roundels. Signs in the same style were also provided at Great Portland Street.



Left: Paddington was given similar treatment to Baker Street, but the panels were subtly different with lettered roundels and a different border layout.

The experimental signs installed at Victoria in 1987 included a new design of frieze panel. These were lettered blue-on-white in New Johnston upper case type, with a line-coloured border stripe applied along the top edge only. Additional information, such as 'Way out' directions, was also displayed at intervals. This style was subsequently adopted as the new standard and has gradually replaced most of the friezes from the 1950s-1960s, and all but one of the original Victoria Line pattern.



Left: An early example of the current platform frieze design, as trialled at Victoria in 1987. Note the absence of a pink Hammersmith & City Line border stripe, dating the sign as pre-1990.



Left: A manufacturing error led to Bermondsey receiving glass platform frieze panels in a reversed colour scheme in 1999. The signs were soon replaced, but this section can be seen today in the Museum of Docklands at West India Quay.



Left: The modern standard platform name frieze in enamel and sat within a grey surround. Note the addition of a Hammersmith & City Line pink stripe, and what appears to be a darkening of the Metropolitan Line maroon to aid colour contrast.

At the time of writing, the current London Underground Signs Manual issue 4 (October 2004) states: "The frieze is an important back-up system of station identification and should be installed at all sub-surface and tube stations. Care must be taken to ensure that its implementation is correct and consistent. The frieze plate must be 250mm deep, with the graphic elements dimensioned as shown ...

The frieze run should be fixed at a constant height of 2.2 metres from platform level to the bottom edge. Station names should appear on each full panel. For long station names, to avoid visual confusion, the station names may appear on every other panel. However, where a panel is installed without the station name, the 'Way out' patch will remain. Where lift access is via a different cross-passage from the main 'Way out', the standard MIP symbols must be displayed adjacent to the 'Way out' patch. Such symbols are required only where direction to the lifts deviates from the main 'Way out'."

PLATFORM NUMBER SIGNS

The history of platform number signs, and platform numbering in general on the Underground, is a subject upon which little has been written. The late Mike Horne's *Metadyne* website suggests there was no general numbering of Underground station platforms prior to 1911, though isolated examples may have existed. For internal purposes, Tube platforms were designated 'northbound', 'southbound', 'eastbound' or 'westbound' as appropriate, but the District and Metropolitan Railways used the main line nomenclature of 'Up' and 'Down' lines. Where multi-platformed stations existed, identification was sometimes by track number – e.g. at Whitechapel: No.1 Road, No.2 Road, No.3 Road etc. (Note: the numbering then read from south to north, the opposite of in LT days).



Left: For many years Putney Bridge had a pair of ex-District Railway signs on platforms 2 & 3. Both were replaced by replicas (one shown here) in 2011. Platform 3 opened in 1910 so may give an indication of the original signs' age.

The District Railway had expanded the use of platform numbers by the early-1930s, with Ealing Broadway and Earl's Court numbered by 1931, possibly Hounslow West (in 1926 when the third platform opened?) and Whitechapel too. In all these instances, trains to the same destination could depart from different platforms, so some form of identification for passengers would have been desirable.

Mike Horne wrote: "One might infer from the evidence that terminal stations were the first to be given platform numbers, probably

from the 1920s, as there was a clear need to be able to direct passengers to one of several platforms for their next train. This was followed by allocation of platform numbers to 'complex' stations on a 'needs' basis where there were multiple platforms on the same line, or where trains to the same destination could leave from more than one platform. It is at least probable that a few busy central London interchange stations were also numbered by the mid-1930s".

Kennington has a surviving sign in 1920s-style referring to platforms 2 & 4, which suggests it was numbered in 1926, or shortly afterwards, when the reversing loop and extra side platforms were opened. The reconstruction of Acton Town, Hammersmith (D&P) and Northfields stations in 1932 saw platforms gain numbers there. Cockfosters was numbered upon opening in 1933, as was Holborn when the Central London Line platforms were commissioned the same year. The Metropolitan Railway numbered Stanmore from the start in 1932, but not the intermediate stations on the branch. Both Uxbridge and Wembley Park were numbered by 1932, and Edgware Road when rebuilt in 1926. The book *Rails Through the Clay* (Jackson and Croome, Capital Transport, 1993) states that the busier central London interchange stations were being numbered by 1936. As an example, on 1 November 1937 Moorgate was allocated platform numbers as follows:

Line	Previous description:	To be numbered:
Metropolitan	Up (Circle)	1
	Down (Circle)	2
	Bays	3 to 8
Northern City	Southbound	9
	Northbound	10
Northern	Southbound	11
	Northbound	12

The original designation of the two Northern City Line platforms seems counter-intuitive. As the GN&CR had left-hand track running throughout, one would have assumed what was to become platform 9 would have been the 'northbound', and platform 10 the 'southbound'. One possibility is that this was an error in the Traffic Circular entry.

The diversion of the City Widened Lines and reconstruction of Moorgate in 1966 ended the use of bay roads 7 & 8, and these vacant numbers were later re-used to renumber Northern Line platforms 11 & 12 (as 7 & 8). 1966 also saw changes at King's Cross St. Pancras, where the eastbound Metropolitan & Circle Lines platform 4 became platform 2. This was an overdue recognition that the former bay road between the Inner Rail and Outer Rail tracks, whose two platform faces were numbered 2 & 3, had been disused for many years. Redundant numbers 3 & 4 were then reassigned to the new Victoria Line platforms in 1968.



Above: 1920s platform numbers at Golders Green with 4-'flight' arrows (Left). Platforms 4 & 5 were provided in connection with the extension of trains to Hendon Central, and then Edgware, in 1923-24. Both carry slightly inaccurate renditions of Johnston type. The design of this direction sign at Kennington (Right) suggests the platforms were renumbered in 1926 when the loop and associated side platforms were opened.

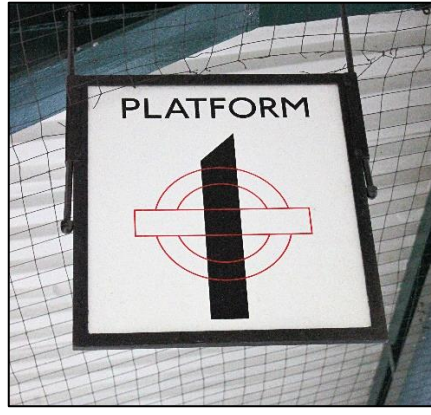
In 1939, a consistent set of rules were established for the numbering of platforms on LT stations. This followed a series of meetings between the Operating Manager (Railways) and the Assistant Publicity Officer. Their conclusions were subsequently adopted by the Chief Signal Engineer, whose department was then responsible for the provision and maintenance of platform number signs. With most stations consisting of just two platforms, the new rule was that those serving westbound or northbound trains were to be numbered '1', whilst those serving eastbound or southbound trains would be '2'. However, stations with more than two platforms, whether termini or intermediate reversing points, sometimes used different conventions. Where lines interchanged, the platforms nearest the surface were usually designated 1 or 2, and those lower down paired in ascending numerical order. There were exceptions to this on occasions – e.g., the Northern Line platforms at Bank, linking Monument's District & Circle Line platforms 1 & 2 and Bank's Central Line platforms 5 & 6, were logically numbered as 3 & 4.

Certain stations numbered earlier, and not conforming with the new scheme, were often left out and not amended to comply. Island platforms were generally not numbered at all, as it was felt the existing station signage was adequate for passenger directions. An anomaly which mostly survives to this day (Oakwood has been renumbered) are the Piccadilly Line stations between Finsbury Park and Cockfosters, where westbound platforms are numbered 2, and eastbound 1 (the reverse of normal). This is a legacy from the days when this part of the line was regarded as a northbound/southbound railway for signage.

As late as 1980, 21 LT-owned platforms remained un-numbered. This deficiency was rectified in subsequent years as stations received new signs. Those stations served by Underground trains, but owned by the main line railways, and later BR, were not included in the changes.

The new Holden stations built from 1932-onwards, and then those constructed under the 1935-40 New Works Programme, saw the appearance of a standard platform number sign. These were of rectangular 'portrait' orientation, with black text upon white, and carried a red roundel in outline overlaid on top. There were also various non-standard platform number signs incorporating full colour renditions of the roundel produced during this period and designed prior to the Carr-Edwards Report.

Opposite: (Top Left) A sign at Aldgate from after the LPTB takeover of the Metropolitan Railway in 1933. The 4-'flight' arrow is featured, and the appearance of the numeral is not correct. The station was probably first numbered earlier, given that northbound trains could depart from any of the four platforms. The ill-proportioned roundel, with its elongated bar, was a device used on other platform number signs of the period (e.g. Rayners Lane).



Left: The standard platform number sign of the 1930s-40s with a red outlined roundel superimposed over the black numeral. This 1940 example is at Finchley Central.

Below: Cockfosters retains a number of non-standard platform number signs from 1933 which carry a short version of the "Signalling Arrow" in brown.



The outlined red roundel disappeared from platform number signs in the early post-war years, most likely another of Hutchinson's attempts to simplify the appearance of the LT corporate identity. In the mid-1950s, he altered the colour of the text from black to blue, which reflected the changes made to signage and maps overall. Later signs often dispensed with the metal-framed surround and had radiused corners of the so-called 'table-top' design. The late-1960s saw black reinstated as the colour for letters and numerals, and this remained the case up until the end of the 1980s.



Above: The red outlined roundel was removed in the post-war years, no doubt at the behest of Hutchinson. This sign (Left) was at Bow Road. Hutchinson changed the colour of text on signs from black to blue in the mid-1950s, as seen (Centre) at Whitechapel. A later sign (Right), also at Whitechapel, and probably from the 1960s, shows how the metal frame was dropped and signs given radiused 'table-top' corners instead.



Previous Page: (Lower Left) Another early-1960s sign, this time at Edgware Road (Met.), with blue lettering and 2-‘flight’ arrows. The sign is unframed and has the radiused corners typical of the period.

Previous Page: (Lower Right) By the late-1960s, black text was again in fashion and the overall appearance reverted to how it had been in the immediate post-war years.



Left: Another sign at Edgware Road (Met.) but with black lettering and Design Research Unit arrows. As such, it can be dated to the late-1960s–1980s period.

When the proposed new-style signs were unveiled at Victoria in 1987 they included a new design for platform numbers. These were now in rectangular

‘landscape’ form, with a line-coloured stripe/s applied along the upper edge. Text reverted to blue-on-white once more, but using the New Johnston typeface, was predominantly lower-case, and ranged left (i.e. not centred).

For the first time, the line name/s was also carried on such signs. Platform numbers were still shown on other types of sign of course – e.g. the wall- and trackside-mounted line diagrams.

This platform number design convention remains the rule in 2021, though the guidelines also allow for a more traditional style of sign bearing only the numeral as text. LU Signs Manual issue 4 states: “On open platforms, the platform confirmation should take the form of a suspended sign with name, colour strip and platform description as shown in figure 1 [e.g. lettered: Victoria line Northbound platform 1]. Where platform confirmation signs are positioned on columns, or where there are sightline width restrictions, an upright format sign may be used, omitting the line name/s”.



Far left: Today’s standards favour the line name being included on platform number signs, which has meant a move away from the traditional ‘portrait’ shape. Note the redrawing of the numeral ‘4’ in New Johnston, which

omits the ‘pointed’ corners (see the previous Edgware Road sign for comparison). This change, and that to the number ‘1’, was reversed in Johnston 100 type.

Above: (Right) New Johnston has appeared on station signs since at least 1987, and originally included a serif or ‘tick’ on the figure ‘1’. This non-standard example was installed at North Acton in 1992 in connection with the new eastbound platform.

Below: (Left) A modern suspended ‘landscape’ sign at the east end of the Central Line.

Below: (Right) Two pole-mounted platform numbers from 1999 at North Greenwich. Both carry Jubilee Line grey stripes along their upper edge.





Above: (Left and Centre) Two modern signs at Stratford dating from 2009. The centre example has a TfL Rail blue stripe. The use of 'portrait'-orientated signs is permitted in areas with restricted sightlines.
Above: (Right) A London Overground version of the modern upright number sign, though omitting the word 'Platform'.

Despite all the changes over the years, many of the older types of platform number remain in use, particularly as they often escape the wholesale replacement of signs visited on stations under refurbishment and modernisation schemes.

To be continued ...