

HIDDEN LONDON TOURS

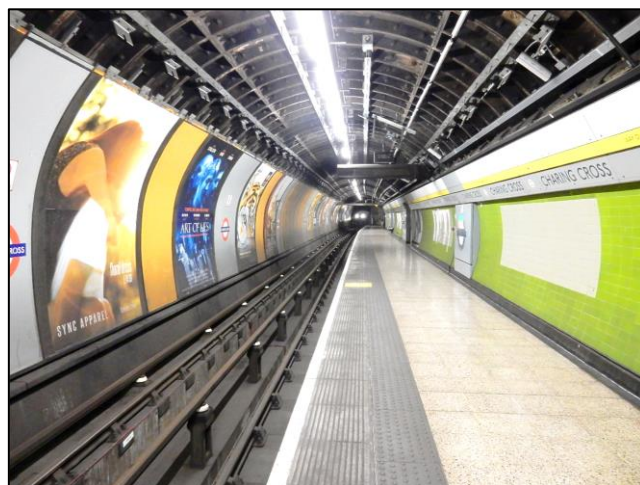
by Stuart Hicks

1. CHARING CROSS

I joined a physical Hidden London tour for the first time for a while on Wednesday 17 November 2021 to visit Charing Cross station.

After meeting in the Northern Line booking hall and having our tickets and photo-id checked (a little over the top I think, really) and the usual safety briefing given, we were led into the station, showing our newly issued wristbands at the gate. The party size was around 15, I think, with all but one suitably face covered. There were two guides and another two staff bringing up the rear, counting us in and out of the backstage parts.

First port of call was the Jubilee Line concourse and then the platforms, all looking mostly as they did in 1999, but as they are used extensively as a “modern” film set, they have some recent advertisements.



Both photos: Rick Griffiths

The bright colours (in contrast to the subdued Victoria Line) were noted but these days look slightly dirty. At the north end of the southbound platform¹ is a trial of the wheelchair hump, now found at some stations on the network. The surfacing used to warn the visually challenged that they are approaching the platform edge was also tested here first. There is a live CIS screen (complete with section not working!!) which replicates Bond Street. Presumably if the southbound says “Charing Cross” the staff have a few minutes to turn on the escalators (not running but they still all work I was told) and open the doors! (*Editor’s note – it believed that trains diverted to Charing Cross are detained at Green Park, and if passengers are inadvertently brought to the station, they are not allowed to exit but are returned by the same train to Green Park*).

We were reminded that the station is a still a live environment and as each overrun track holds two complete trains - you can tuck six trains away here ready to bring out quickly when, for example, a concert or match finishes at Wembley. Most of the ceiling has been exposed because the previous panelling does not meet safety standards. On the eastbound platform, a hoist has been installed to facilitate transfer of engineering work equipment onto trains. We then left the Jubilee Line part of the station by the central stairs towards the Bakerloo Line, pausing to note the American subway sign installed for some recent filming, which may have been the James Bond movie *Skyfall*, and entered the public part of the station briefly before continuing into a long service tunnel. Heading towards the north west, it was used in the construction of the Jubilee Line to take out spoil etc. and the shaft (now filled in) was located under where the Sainsbury wing of the National Gallery now is. It features a pronounced curve to avoid passing beneath Nelson’s column and a gradient down towards the shaft, apparently so that narrow gauge wagons full of spoil could be pushed downhill. Nowadays it mostly contains various spare parts at one side. The far end section has partly been converted into offices and we were not allowed to venture that far. Back to the public tunnels and round a corner and we disappeared again behind the scenes, this time into the platform ventilation shafts. These were fitted to the new Jubilee Line platforms as attitudes towards station cooling had moved on, and at Charing Cross also to the

¹ Although the Jubilee Line nomenclature changes from south/north to east/west at Green Park Junction, the line to Charing Cross remains south- and northbound.

Northern Line platforms at that time. We could see down onto both the Northern Line platforms and the trains stopping below.

Some 90 minutes after starting, that brought our tour to an end and we emerged again where we had started, in the Northern Line ticket hall, to thank our hosts and be reminded of the discounts available at the museum shop and forthcoming tours.

I have two 'virtual' tours booked for later this month, to Euston (where I have been on a tour physically) and York Road (which I understand would be impossible physically).

2. YORK ROAD

Emily Turner from the London Transport Museum led this virtual tour, along with Gill G. on 29 November 2021 at 18.00. There were around 18 participants from all around the UK, with some from further afield. (*Editor's note – some of the information given is corrected and amplified in footnotes*).

Emily started by showing the position of York Road (and some other now-closed underground stations) on a D.H. Evans underground map, highlighting how easy it was to reach their shop by train.

York Road opened with the rest of that stretch of what is now called the Piccadilly Line in 1906. Unusually, the lifts took passengers straight to the platforms, as opposed to the usual practice of a surface building at the side of the road with lifts down from there and passageways across to reach the platforms as the tracks were normally directly under roadways. This was because the tracks at this point were under cheap land in the area. Other stations also with lifts to platform level are Caledonian Road (almost identical), Earl's Court (Piccadilly), which is similar but which also had the first escalators on the line, and King's Cross (where the lifts were away beyond one end of the platforms). The surface buildings have the usual Leslie Green` design. Provision was made for four lifts in two shafts although it is unclear whether 3 and 4 were ever installed – if there were they were moved fairly quickly as they had certainly gone by 1927².

The station was one of those closed because of the General Strike from 4 May 1926, and as passenger volumes had been lower than anticipated, it remained closed (along with Brompton Road) for several months until public pressure forced a reopening on 4 October 1926³. However, it closed permanently from 19 September 1932. The station is only half a mile north of King's Cross and the area had a lot of housing to the east of the line, but it was cheap railway housing in poor condition.

The surface buildings are still present by what is now York Way, still surrounded by light industry, and are used for ventilation (see later) although now surrounded by a high security fence.



Both photos: Stuart Hicks

The building has the station name and entrance and exit on the front, and the name on the side, but the station plan which we saw showed another exit on the north wing from lifts 3 and 4. As these may not have been installed or used much, the second exit may well not have been opened⁴. Indeed, the front exit was closed after a few years with passengers exiting via the entrance⁵. There was a booking office at opening, but it was closed early on and machines installed. A pedestal ticket "office" (similar to that at Aldwych) was installed, probably in the 1920s. We saw the lovely gentlemen's toilet with red and

² It is confirmed that there were only ever two lifts provided at York Road, Nos.1 and 2 in one shaft. The other shaft remained empty.

³ Whilst York Road reopened on 4 October 1926, it never reopened on Sundays.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ As happened at some other lightly-used stations.

orange wall tiles and the Oates & Green of Halifax urinals. We also saw what appeared to be a fireplace in the corridor leading to the second exit and believe that it had been turned into staff accommodation. Some green tiles with pomegranates were visible and are still intact, as are some at Holloway Road and Edgware Road (Bakerloo Line), as this is the rarer of the two alternative designs.

The two lift shafts had an 89' 6" rise, each containing two lozenge shaped lifts⁶. The adjacent staircase now has 154 steps down a modern clockwise metal spiral staircase, with a ventilation shaft down the centre, but the original stairs and their tiling have gone – the original staircase was anticlockwise. One reason given for not being able to take physical tours into the station is that the staircase is wet, and in the film, there was certainly a fair bit of water ingress, although it was admitted that the videos were taken on a day when it was raining hard. More tiling was visible at the bottom of the shaft.

Another video took us along the westbound platform. The tiles are in situ along the side of the platform and over the top of the tracks, but the platform itself was removed, partly to allow trains to pass at line speed. Passing into one of the cross passages we saw a G. Wooliscroft maker's mark on one of the tiles. Another cross passage was shown with the dark yellow paint in the upper half above the tiles.

The eastbound platform is similar in most ways but there is a brick building on the platform containing an electrical control panel. The walls are generally painted white to obscure the location. Most of the platform has also been removed but part remains by the former wooden signal box (which used to have a Westinghouse B frame but is now empty) which was retained to control the trailing crossover at the northern end of the platforms. The box remained open until 25 April 1962 and must have latterly been a lonely place to work⁷. The eastbound platform was used for engineering storage and may also have had WWII usage.

The video returned to the bottom of the lifts. The shaft for lifts 3 and 4 is not used but that for 1 and 2 still has its original Otis gates at the bottom. It now has metal steps for access up inside but the top is capped. Duct extractor fans are at the top and still play an important part of the ventilation arrangements for the Piccadilly Line.

We returned to the surface and the tour was nearly at the end, other than a variety of questions which were well answered. It was an enjoyable 90 minutes.

3. EUSTON

This virtual tour was led by Gill G. on 29 November 2021 at 20.30, supported by Emily Turner. Again, participants came from all around the UK with some from further afield. (*Editor's note – some of the information given is corrected and amplified in footnotes*).

Gill opened with a general introduction to the railways of Euston, including the Metropolitan Railway at (now) Euston Square and the main line station, including illustrations of the Great Hall and Euston Arch.

1907 saw the first deep level tube lines at Euston, with both the City & South London (CSLR) and the Charing Cross, Euston & Hampstead (CCE&H) lines arriving at different ends of the station. The C&SLR was opened in May 1907 and CCE&H in June. Although operated by different companies, they recognised that there would be passengers wanting to interchange between the two lines and constructed an interchange passage for them, complete with a rebooking office.

The C&SLR buildings in what was then Seymour Street and is now Eversholt Street were demolished in 1914⁸ and LMS railway offices built on the site. We saw a film showing the steps to the platforms and the ventilation shaft above them.

The video then continued on the southbound C&SLR platform, along the platform and into the former northbound running tunnel, left after the 1967 Victoria Line changes and now used for storage. Seemingly, it is not possible to access these on a physical tour because it only has one entrance. (*But*

⁶ Only two (lozenge-shaped) lifts were ever provided in one shaft.

⁷ York Road signal cabin closed after traffic 25 April 1964 and the area converted to automatic working. It was little used since reversing facilities were available at King's Cross from 25 November 1956. Prior to then it was the usual practice for the signalman to travel to York Road on the train to be reversed, and back on the same train. It was the practice for the Aldwych shuttle train to reverse at York Road at night and form the staff train to Hammersmith and thence to Lillie Bridge Depot. This was abolished from 9 January 1933 when the Aldwych shuttle became based at Northfields. York Road was used to reverse trains from 18 November to 5 December 1940 when the line was closed east of King's Cross because of WW2 damage. Thereafter it was retained for emergency use or reversing Ballast trains.

⁸ It is doubtful that the C&SLR station building was demolished in 1914 – the LMS didn't come into being until 1922. Moreover, the LMS headquarters at Euston House didn't open until 12 February 1934.

aren't most deep level underground stations like that, Lancaster Gate – which your writer used to use a lot – springs to mind?).

Back to the surface, we moved to the Leslie Green CCE&H station in Melton Street, which was also closed as a passenger entrance in 1914. The video took us through the left-hand door, once a shop, and took us into the office upstairs. Then into the centre door, as tours several years ago used to do, which led to another ventilation shaft. The images continued down the stairs, past a large fan, noting the blue and white colour scheme on the tiles that stretch all the way down along the former anticlockwise spiral staircase. Another shaft, formerly with lifts, is used as a cable run. The surface buildings are expected to be demolished soon (as they have been for most of 2021!) but also got captured again by my camera (*Below*) on 30 November 2021.

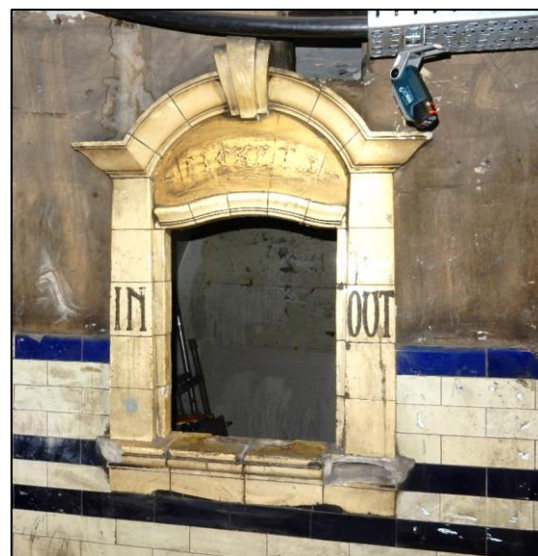


Both photos: Stuart Hicks

We then saw video along the connecting tunnels leading from the CCE&H platforms east to the subterranean elements of the C&SLR station. These were closed from 29 April 1964⁹ as part of the Victoria Line preparatory works and still contain period advertisements. The only remaining below ground “interchange” ticket office is visible down here (*Right*).

Photo: Rick Griffiths

Our video switched to the underground entrance from what are now platforms 8-11 in the centre of the main line station, although the access was a much narrower flight of stairs down then. Below, not surprisingly, was a ticket window and passages to the lifts, past a huge “To the lifts” sign. The station had circular lift shafts and we saw a modern set of stairs one side of a shaft, which once contained three lifts¹⁰. Many of the tiles we saw appear beautifully preserved although some cables have been attached to them. The final video showed us the LMSR wartime control room, which was at lower lift shaft level. It was partly removed and replaced by a lengthy Victoria Line ventilation tunnel.



Videos down below, our completed the tour was nearly at the end. Questions posed by participants in the chat were well answered either during the tour or at the end. Most of the latter parts of this tour are included in the Euston station physical tours which have recently restarted.

⁹ Not sure where this date came from. The passageway between the CCE&H and C&SLR (today's Northern Line Charing Cross branch and Northern Line City branch respectively) was closed from 13 October 1967 (and still contain period advertisements). The new ticket hall opened at Euston and new escalators 7/8 were in service from 8 March 1965 but open only 06.00 to 20.00 weekdays. From 29 April 1966, one (out of the three) lifts was taken out of use.

¹⁰ None of the lift shafts at Euston contained three lifts. There were a pair in the C&SLR station, and a pair in the CCE&H station (although there were two shafts, one of which remained empty). These closed in 1914 (q.v.). In the interchange subway there were two lift shafts and three lifts. One shaft contained one lift and the spiral stairs.