

100 YEARS OF ACTON WORKS

Back in December 1920, the plans to build a central workshop for the Underground's rolling stock were being drawn up, then comprising the District Railway, Piccadilly, Bakerloo and Central London. At that time, all four lines rolling stock would have access to the new Works, the District about a mile away from Ealing Common Depot, the Piccadilly similarly (Lillie Bridge was not an overhaul depot), the Bakerloo via the West London Line (the London Road site was cramped and inadequate) and the Central London, which was given access to the District when it was extended to Ealing in 1920 and would thus take over the work done at Wood Lane. All of these had become inadequate as traffic developed because of increases in rolling stock and car mileage.

To that end, some 30 acres of land were purchased on the south-west side of Acton Town and building work began in December 1921. The first part of the new works opened in December 1922. Traction current had been switched on in July 1922. Track access with the necessary signalling was then commissioned on 5 November 1922, which allowed access to and from Acton Works. The official opening of Acton Works took place on 1 January 1923 – 100 years ago.

The work to be undertaken at the new Acton Works was rolling stock overhaul, car body repainting and repairs, along with electrical and mechanical equipment. Initially, the stocks to be overhauled were from the District, Piccadilly and Bakerloo lines. The Central London's stock would follow later, as would the Hampstead & City, but only after a link with the latter had been commissioned between it and the Piccadilly Line at King's Cross (which was from 27 March 1927). Out of the equation until 1933 was the Metropolitan Railway, which was independent from the Underground group of railways and had its own facilities at Neasden.

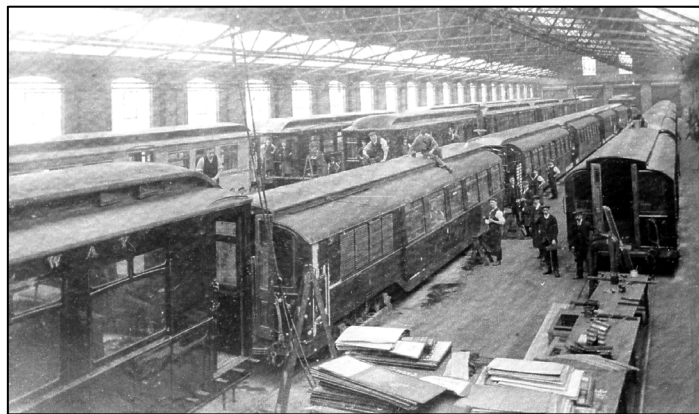
After opening, some 16 cars a week were being overhauled, along with stores manufacturing work for the outlying depots. The system of operation chosen for the new Acton Works was termed the "progressive system", whereby each car is moved in stages from shop to shop until the overhaul is complete. At the beginning of the overhaul process, the cars are placed on accommodation bogies and are moved by two separate electric traversers and capstans. Of course, the Works site was subsequently enlarged over the years, embracing the Metropolitan Railway stock from 1933. It was heavily involved in manufacturing during the Second World War.

In a change of direction in the 1980s, the decision was taken to devolve the overhaul of cars to the depots on each line because much of the equipment at Acton Works needed replacing. However, the works was still responsible for the overhaul of some equipment, after it had been removed from cars at the depots – it had to be transported by road ... Depots began doing their own heavy overhauls, as follows:

- Piccadilly Line – Cockfosters – from April 1986
- Victoria Line – Northumberland Park – from May 1986
- Northern Line – Golders Green from September 1985
- Bakerloo Line – Stonebridge Park – from February 1986
- Metropolitan Line – Neasden – from May 1987
- District Line – Ealing Common – from July 1988 to October 1996 (which was a once round of all D Stock).
- Central Line – Ruislip from March 1989.

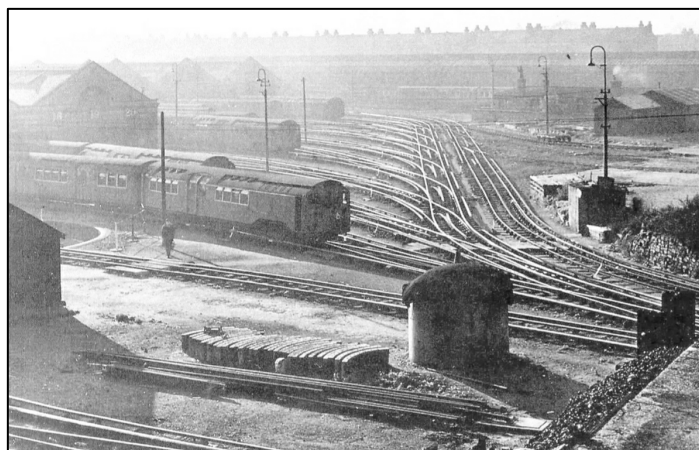
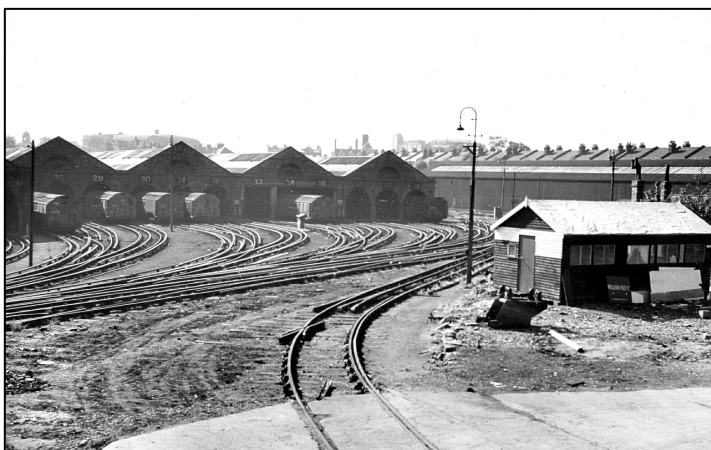
The above are the very briefest of summaries of the depot overhaul dates. Much changed over the years, from changing locations, stock types and then changing the traditional Heavy Overhaul to programme lift and enhanced programme lift. (*Further details of depot overhauls and 'who did what and when' will follow in a future article including the Jubilee Line's 1983 Tube Stock and other depots' involvements – Ed.*) Today, only the Bakerloo Line still does the traditional Heavy Overhaul as we know it, but there is no longer any repaints or visible exterior indication that such work has been done.

Although much of the Acton Works site was disused after 1985, a new Equipment Overhaul Workshop on the Works site was created in 1989. The following year, a Depot Engineering Support Unit (DESU) opened at Ealing Common Depot, located on sidings at its eastern end, but this was short-lived, and the functions of the Support Unit were relocated back to Acton Works soon afterwards, with the building at Ealing Common being used to store items from the LTM. More recently, some of the redundant buildings have been demolished and replaced by new buildings to enable the 1992 Tube Stock on the Central Line to be heavily modified.



Above: (Left) The Bakerloo Line's depot at London Road was built on a very cramped site and in a cutting, and the main workshop was on the left hand side beside the tunnel mouth to the main Bakerloo Line, the edge of which can be seen to the left. The train to the right is in the blind tunnel shunting neck and is formed of original 1906 Gate Stock. Above the two tunnel mouths is the signal cabin, which was closed on 29 May 1915 and control to and from the main line then passed to the cabin at Westminster Bridge Road (Lambeth (North)) from 15 April 1917).

Above: (Right) In the early years, the overhaul and repair of Piccadilly Line's trains was done at the District Railway's Mill Hill Park Works (later Ealing Common Depot) because Lillie Bridge Depot was inadequate and did not have the facilities, there being access between the two lines east of Barons Court for stock transfers. Both District and Piccadilly stocks are seen 'in work'.



Above: Work on the Central London Railway's rolling stock was initially undertaken at its depot at Wood Lane, but after Acton Works has opened, overhauls and repairs were concentrated there. After the western extension of the Central Line to West Ruislip opened in 1948, Wood Lane then ceased to do major work and became a stabling point with just 16 tracks, with maintenance then being done at Ruislip (and Hainault) depots. These are rare views of Wood Lane in its closing days as a depot, with Pre-1938 Tube Stock in evidence. Of course, other views of Wood Lane Depot exist but with original Central London Railway stock.



Previous Page: (Lower, Left) District 1920 Stock motor car 625 on the left, before renumbering in 1928. It was renumbered again in 1930, before becoming 4591 with London Transport and classed as F Stock. In the centre is a D Stock motor car 163 of 1911, lifted off its bogies.

Previous Page: (Lower, Right) Acton Works after the Bakerloo and Central London stocks had come under its wing. At the top is motor car 25J of 1920 Watford Joint Tube Stock and beneath is a Central London 'Ealing' motor car 401, which was originally numbered 278 but became 3921 with London Transport. To the left and right foreground are two accommodation bogies.



Above: Acton Works yard with a traverser on the right. From the left is a 1920 Watford Joint Tube Stock car, a District Railway car of 1905-11 vintage and in the centre three Pre-1938 Tube Stock trailer cars built in 1928 by UCC (Feltham), which appear to be new rather than overhauled.

Photo: LURS Collection

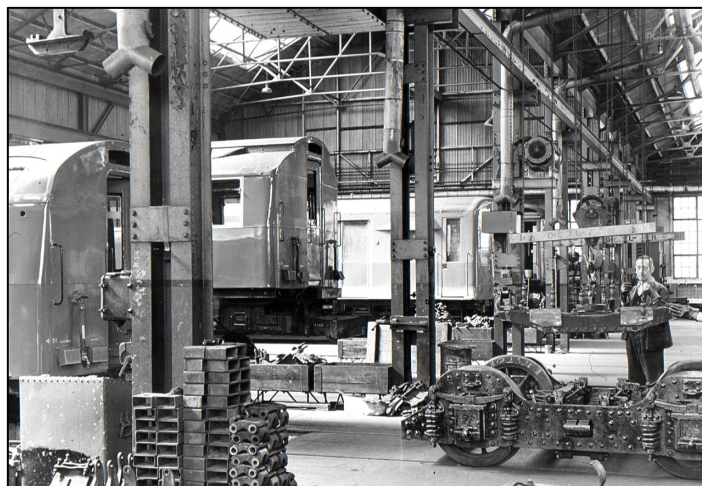


Left: Acton Works yard in July 1933 with an ex-works Central London train of 1903/00 'Tunnel' Stock on the left, a Morden-Edgware train of Standard Stock in the centre and a District L Stock motor car on the right.

Below: (Left) Early-1950s in Acton Works, when the cream colour was still dividing the saloon windows and LT transfers being applied on trailers and NDMs.

Below: The end of two Pre-1938 cars to the left and a P Stock motor car hiding between the stanchions.

All photos: LT Museum





Above: Out in the Works yard, with a line up of freshly overhauled bogies, with one being moved by the overhead crane. Cars of 1938 Tube Stock and P Stock are in evidence.

Below: Heavy overhauls and repaints from Acton Works always looked immaculate, as with this 1938 Tube Stock waiting to return to the Bakerloo Line.

Photos: LURS Collection (Above), Brian Hardy (Below)





Above: Also looking pristine is the one-off “sunshine window” or “vista dome” car 10306 of 1938 Tube Stock after its overhaul and repaint in Acton Works in 1971.

Photo: LURS Collection

Below: A selection of the depot overhaul stickers that were used when depot overhauls began.

First row: Two Golders Green versions, Stonebridge Park and Cockfosters.

Second row: Northumberland Park, two Upminster versions and Ealing Common.

Bottom row: Neasden and then three versions at Ruislip, for interior refurb, 1962 Stock heavy overhaul and the 1938 Stock that returned to service in 1986.

All photos: Brian Hardy

