

REMEMBERING ALDWYCH

INTRODUCTION

30 years ago on 30 September 1994, the overrated and underused short branch of the Piccadilly Line between Holborn and Aldwych was closed to passengers. Latterly a rush hours only service, the expense of renewing the 1907 lifts wasn't justified by the number of passengers using the service. As well as emergency spiral stairs, there were two lifts provided from opening, although there were three shafts, each capable of holding two lifts – two shafts remained empty from day one.

The working of the Aldwych branch in its early years has been documented before in *Underground News*, and more detail can be found in the excellent book "The Aldwych Branch" by Antony Badsey-Ellis and Mike Horne (ISBN 978-1-85414-321-1). Although now out of print, copies may occasionally be found on second hand book websites.

Suffice to say, the derisory traffic offering on the branch led to the service being worked on a "one engine in steam" basis. It is thought that the last use of the southbound tunnel to Aldwych was in c.1912 (but possibly even earlier), with the original signalling arrangements decommissioned on 16 August 1917. The southbound road into Aldwych station was shortened around the same time and trains could no longer run into the station itself. The crossover just south of Holborn was removed on 13 January 1918. But it took until 21 August 1927 for the signalled 'wrong road' move from Holborn eastbound back to Covent Garden to be abolished, even though it hadn't been used for many years.

Service reductions:

05.10.1908 – Through late-night Theatre train ex-Aldwych (then Strand) withdrawn.

08.04.1917 – Last day of Sunday service.

21.09.1940 – Line closed after traffic.

01.07.1946 – Line reopened post-WW2.

09.06.1958 – Service reduced to Monday to Friday rush hours and Saturdays until c.14.00.

18.08.1962 – Rush hours only on Mondays to Fridays.

During the following years, the service operational hours contracted, so at closure were 07.27 to 10.13 and 15.51 to 18.28. Moreover, when the longer 1959/62 Tube Stock took over in July 1964, to give the train crew sufficient time to change ends, intervals were widened to every 7½ minutes and when the longer still 1973 Tube Stock was introduced in October 1979, intervals became every 9 minutes. This was a far cry from the early-'teens when 17 trains per hour was the norm.



The Pre-1938 Tube Stock (*Above, Left*) of 1931/34 motor cars operated the Aldwych shuttle from January 1950, replacing the double-ended motor cars of 1906 vintage, which had been fitted with air doors in 1922. However, the Pre-1938 Stock was no stranger to the Aldwych branch and had deputised for the 1906 cars when they were off for maintenance. The platforms at Aldwych were 250ft long, enough for a four-car train, but the Leslie Green tiles stretched only for two-cars length. The far end of the platform was in darkness and only a simple barrier was provided. Seen from the opposite direction (*Above, Right*) after 1959 Tube Stock had replaced the Pre-1938 Stock in July 1964, with the east end of the three car unit in the dark beyond the barrier. Although the Aldwych branch had a dedicated three-car unit of 1962 Tube Stock, 1959 Stock substituted on occasions, with DM 1211 nearest the camera in this view. On the right is an 'auto' telephone box.

Photos: LT Museum (Left) and LURS Collection (Right)

Prior to WW2, the Aldwych train was not allocated a train set number in the working timetable, being shown simply as 'Ald' (whether it was shown differently in the timetables when the station was called 'Strand' isn't known).

Even though train set numbers were allocated for the Aldwych shuttle from reopening on 01.07.46 (100) and 200 (from 14.09.59), the Aldwych train continued to be shown in the WTTs as 'Ald'. From WTT No.84 of 12 June 1961, however, the train set number of 270 was allocated to the Aldwych train and shown as such in

WTT		No.	WTT	No.
47	06.05.46	100	88	09.09.63
81	14.09.59	200	89	12.10.64
84	12.06.61	270	92	16.10.67
87	17.06.63	290		250

the timetable. A summary of the set numbers allocated from 1946 until 1994 is as shown above.



A pair of 1931/34 MCCW motor cars stand awaiting departure from Holborn, believed to be in the late-1950s. Even though by then the service was every 5 minutes (one minute running time in each direction, one minute to reverse at Aldwych and two minutes to reverse at Holborn), there was still time for the train crew to have a chat when changing ends, and they are seen sitting on the seat right of centre. Above where the crew are sitting was a bell push which, when operated, rang a bell in the lift at Aldwych. This informed the liftman to take the lift down, and its passengers would arrive on the platform as the train arrived. The liftman would then wait for the passengers from the arriving train and then ascend to top level. The process would then be repeated every five minutes. Quite when the bell push was installed isn't known, but it was certainly in operation in 1917. In Traffic Notice 39/17 dated September 1917, it states, "To avoid delay at Aldwych, Conductors working on this branch are required to ring the Aldwych lift bell 30 seconds before departure time from Holborn". This method of operation continued right through until the Piccadilly Line resignalling of the Holborn area in March 1980. The signal cabin at Holborn closed and control was then from Earl's Court Regulating Room. From then, the audible indication at Aldwych was activated by the occupation of a track circuit as the train departed Holborn for Aldwych.

Photo: LURS Collection

Another interesting point about Aldwych was that in March 1922 (confirmed by Traffic Notice 6/22), telephone lines were provided in each lift shaft at Aldwych for communication with Traffic Controller in the event of a problem. A telephone handset had to be clipped onto two bare telephone wires provided in each lift shaft (with the lift stationary of course!). When this facility was abolished isn't clear, but possibly (1) when automatic telephones were installed in the lifts at Aldwych (at an unknown date) or (2) when the Piccadilly Line Controllers moved from Leicester Square to Earl's Court in May 1970.

ALDWYCH – IN APRIL 2024

All the photographs that follow are © Margaret Flo McEwan and were taken on 12 April 2024



Above: Like most Leslie Green stations of the Piccadilly, Bakerloo and Hampstead railways that had surface buildings, separate entrance and exits to and from the lifts were provided, which included the building in Surrey Street (Right) which slopes down towards the River Thames. However, like many lightly used stations of the time, one of the access points was soon closed and all passengers concentrated via the other. There was one arched window in the centre but this was later

changed to the present arrangement. The entrance actually in Strand (Left) comprised just one entrance with the traditional arched window above. At the very beginning, station names included 'Tube', e.g. 'Piccadilly Tube' but a change in management policy in March 1908 dictated that all Underground railways (including the Metropolitan, Great Northern & City and Central London) adopt 'Underground' instead of 'Tube'. To that end, 'Tube' was replaced by 'Rly'. We must also remember that the station was first called 'Strand', being renamed Aldwych on 9 May 1915.

Below: Although provided with three lift shafts, Aldwych only ever had two lifts in one shaft. Upgraded in 1952-54, they were still essentially 1907 vintage and the cost of their replacement and the low passenger usage of the station led to the line's closure on 30 September 1994. Note the ornate iron grille above each lift and the lift position indicators – now out of use and the lifts anchored down.



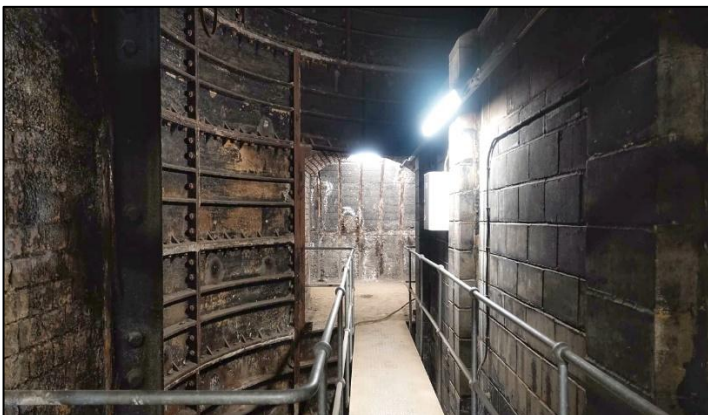
Above: The only way down and up at Aldwych since closure 30 years ago is walking via the emergency spiral stairs, which are in remarkably good condition, as is much of the tiling. The journey up and down is not for the faint hearted though, as the distance from top to the lower landing is 76.5ft, and then more stairs for a further 19.5ft to reach the platforms.

Below: (Left) The bottom landing looking towards where the two operative lifts were. The access point on the left is one that would have led to the centre lifts if they had ever been installed and behind, further access to the other unused lift shaft. To the right is the passageway to and from the platforms.

Below: (Right) The passageway leading to the platforms is on a downward slope, as can be appreciated, with further stairs beyond to platform level.



Left: Only one side of the two lifts were ever used, the rear gates were disabled and access blocked to the public. Indeed, the passageways in that area were never tiled and left in an unkempt state, as it was thought that traffic would never justify its completion – of which, more in a moment. The two lifts of 1907 vintage were upgraded in the 1950s, No.1 being completed and back in service on 28 April 1952 and No.2 on 5 February 1954. In modified form, the winding gear had been refurbished and new control equipment installed. Landing control was also provided but with staff selling tickets inside the lift they were, in the main, controlled from within. But in essence, they were still of 1907 vintage (with some updated equipment as mentioned) and were long past their sell-by date, despite the 1950s upgrading.





Above: (Left) In the centre lift shaft, a room of some kind has been built as seen on the right, with access across to the unfinished and never-opened passageways.

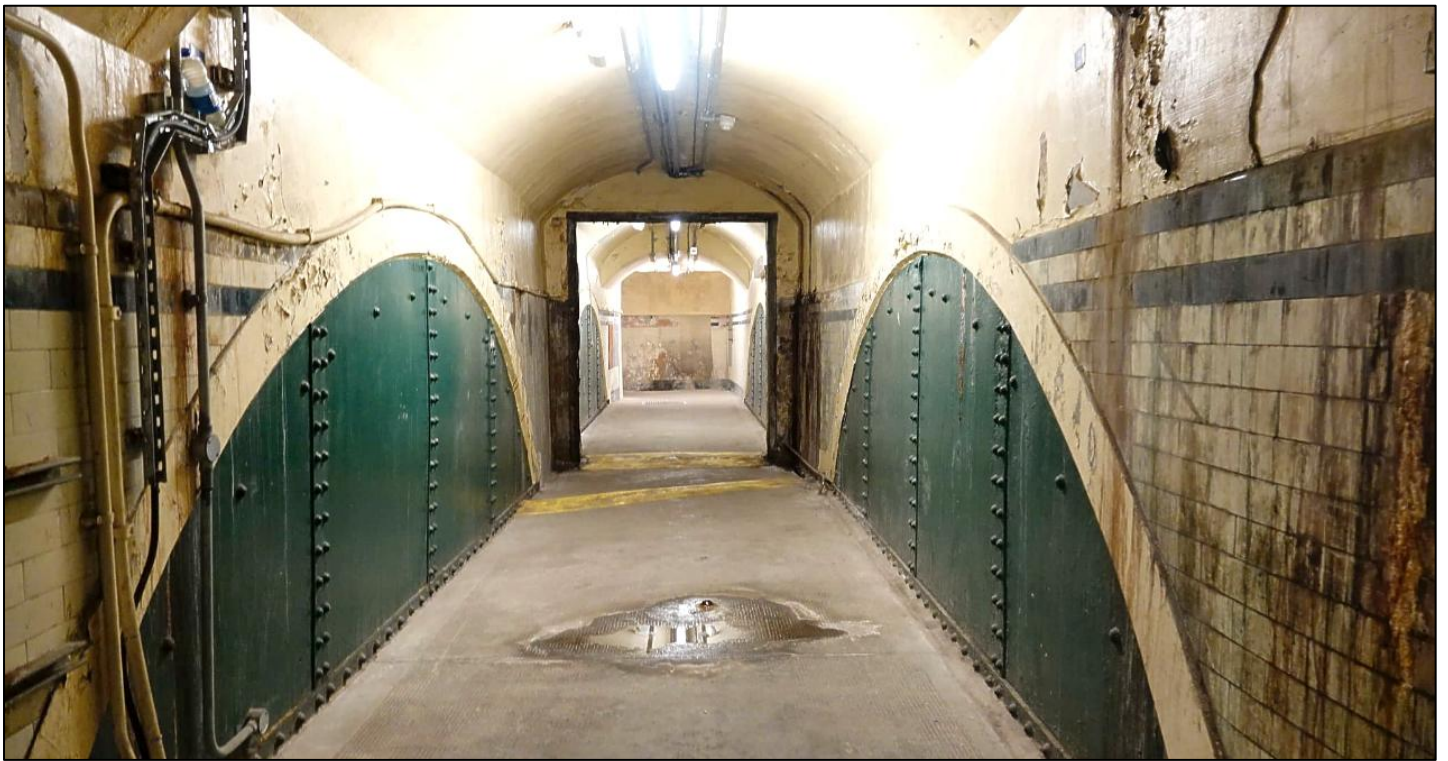
Above: Looking up in the unused lift shaft, capped off at the top.

Left: The passageway at the back of the lifts which have never been completed, nor seen passengers. On the right would have been access to/from the lifts.

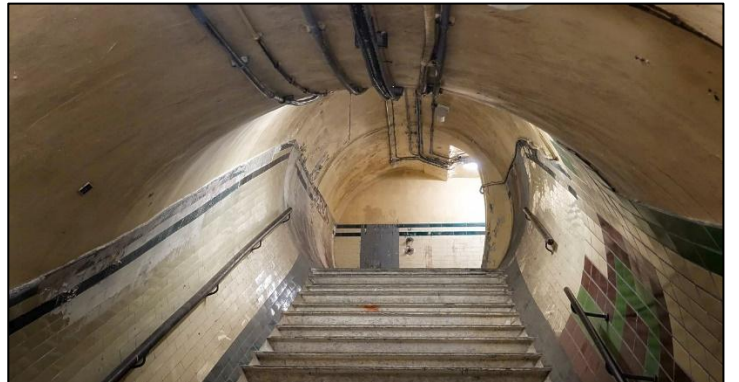
Below: The incomplete and thus unused passageways also lead to the platforms, each one having its separate passageway and stairs.



Opposite: (Top) From the bottom of the former operational side of the lifts at the lower landing, access to and from the operational platform (that was) is to the left but behind your photographer. Looking ahead, this passageway then crosses that platform and then crosses the long-disused platform, each having stairs to platform level.



Below: At the far end of the passageway is access to the long disused platform. It retains some of its original tiling but this area has been used for experiments with future deep tube station décor. Looking down towards the platform (Left) is a section of brown and green tiles, which were installed as a trial prior to the refurbishment of Piccadilly Circus station in the 1980s. Looking up from platform level (Right), apart from the experimental tiles, much of the original tiling remains.



Left: On the long-disused platform looking towards Holborn, a little original tiling remains in place, but most of it has been removed following various station décor trials over the years. It should be noted that this platform was abandoned long before suicide pits had been invented and thus retains some of its original running rails and current rails.

Overleaf: (Top) In the opposite direction and looking towards the end of the line, showing that more of the original tiling remains. The way in/out is left of centre with stairs leading up to the passageway and crossing the track (see above). Note the open door in the centre of the photograph, which leads to the incomplete subways to the back of the lifts.



Left: The same view as above but looking from the platform. Behind the brick wall (installed at some time since closure) is the short overrun tunnel.

Below: The end of the line in the overrun tunnel with probably the original buffer stop still in place. Despite there being a number of different attempts to get the line extended to Waterloo, the line ends firmly at this point.





Above: Further along the long-abandoned platform and looking towards Holborn – the abandoned tunnel is beyond the closed doors.

Left: Track was lifted from the abandoned tunnel many years ago, although the wooden sleepers remain in place. However, with no passenger service in this tunnel since around 1912, and maybe before that, the track remained, even after the signalling was



decommissioned on 16 August 1917 and the track severed short of the platform. The crossover between the through line at Holborn and the remaining line to Aldwych was removed on 13 January 1918. But that was not the end of the abandoned tunnel, for during 1921 and 1922, 20 newly delivered 1920 Cammell Laird trailer cars were stored there because their motor car counterparts were not then ready. With no crossover, the track was slewed and connected up to the abandoned track and then slewed back after. The process was repeated when the cars were removed.



Left: On what was the operational platform until the line closed on 30 September 1994, this looks to the overrun tunnel, in which one of the two cars was uncoupled and stabled during slack hours pre-WW2. On the right is the unfinished access to the back of the lifts, which was never opened. The condition of the voussoir (around the tunnel mouth) leaves a lot to be desired.



Left: The end of the line in the overrun tunnel with the fixed red light illuminated.

Below: The remaining operational platform looking towards Holborn. Tiling was only completed for about two-car lengths (where the bar is across the track), beyond which was originally a flimsy barrier and darkness. When the longer 1973 Tube Stock was introduced, that area had lighting installed and the tunnel segments painted cream.



Below: Looking towards Holborn with the OPO mirror remaining in position after some 30 years.

