SOCIETY MEETING REVIEW
A RUMMAGE THROUGH THE ARCHIVES

Our speaker for January 2022, the first LURS meeting since the start of the Covid pandemic, was the author and historian Antony Badsey-Ellis. This was also the first meeting at our new venue, the Model Railway Club HQ at Keen House, near to King's Cross.

The talk was to be an eclectic look through various material from the archives. The speaker explained how his original intention had been to take a look at some of the more unusual material in his collection, but had decided to widen the scope to show off the variety of documents held at some of the major archives holding material relating to the Underground.

He started by explaining how he has used a selection of archives as part of the research for the six books that he has written about the Underground. These are:

1. The National Archives, based at Kew, holding the records of the British government.
2. The London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), in Farringdon, which holds records mostly from the City of London, but includes many sets from the early years of the Underground companies (especially the Metropolitan Railway), as well as the GLC, London County Council, and Metropolitan Board of Works.
3. The Parliamentary Archive, housed in the Victoria Tower of the Palace of Westminster, which has all of the documents deposited with Parliament in connection with the Bills that have been promoted for railway companies.
4. The Guildhall Library, located in the City, which holds a subset of the City of London records.
5. The TfL Corporate Archives, which hold records of TfL, LT, and predecessors, and
6. The London Transport Museum, which has a smaller set of records but includes important items such as Frank Pick's personal records, and a working timetable library.

The joy, and sometimes frustration, of using the archives is never quite knowing what one will find, especially as the catalogues are sometimes incomplete. One file requested at the National Archives by the speaker was described as relating to the early years of Euston station. When received, it had a few pages about this topic, but the rest was entirely concerning fire precautions, following the tragic fire on the Paris Métro in 1903, and how a similar event could be avoided in London. As a result of reading this, further research was conducted leading to a detailed article in *Underground News* about how fire safety evolved on the London Underground. *(See "The Lessons of Couronnes", Underground News, February 2010).*

We were then shown a succession of images of documents from a number of these archives in chronological order, starting with a look at Parliamentary plans. These are large books containing both plans and sections of proposed railways, and which had to be deposited with Parliament by 30 November of the year before the Parliamentary session in which they were to be considered. The covers were often decorative, and we saw an example of this from the City & North of London Railway in 1890. This was a plan, deposited just two weeks before the opening of the C&SLR, to extend that railway from the sharp curves west of King William Street station northwards to Angel. Although the Bill was unsuccessful, a similar extension was finally made in 1901, by the C&SLR in their own name.

Plans and sections of an unsuccessful extension of the Baker Street & Waterloo Railway (today's Bakerloo Line) from Regent's Park station to Euston were next. These showed how the promoters of a new railway had to set out on a plan the route that they would follow and provide a section showing the depth. Such plans were often annotated by the receiving authorities to show other subterranean features such as sewers.

Many archives store the plan books rolled up, which is how they were supplied by the railway company promoters. One memorable occasion was when the speaker was researching for *London's Lost Tube Schemes* at the LMA, and requested the plans for the North and South London Railway. The rolled book arrived, secured by a ribbon, which was not uncommon. However, this ribbon was set into an original wax seal, showing that the plans had never been opened – perhaps unsurprisingly given that the scheme was not proceeded with. The conservation team had to be consulted, and they ceremoniously cut the ribbon, accepting that if the document was to be viewable then cutting the ribbon and preserving the seal was probably the best solution. Needless to say, after a century of being continuously rolled it was very reluctant to be put flat onto a table to be viewed!

A plan of the decorative railings around the stairwell to the underground ticket hall at Euston was then shown. The detailing on the drawing was very impressive, and a stamp showed that this drawing was

originally provided to the LNWR (presumably by the tube company when they were arranging to construct their access from the main-line station).

The Building Act Case Files held at the LMA have a fascinating set of old photographs of station buildings that were submitted by the UERL as they sought permission to add UNDERGROUND signs to their station exteriors. The photographs appear to be ones taken shortly after the stations opened, and have had mock-ups of the new signs added using white paint and blue ink. Small sketches in the margins provide the dimensions of the signs, and some also show some of the building measurements. The example that was shown was at Tufnell Park.

From 1911 we saw a brochure from the Ozonair Company. This was employed by the Central London Railway (CLR) to install equipment at their stations to add ozone to the air that was pumped down to the station platforms. At the time, the smell of ozone was associated with healthiness and the seaside; today it is known that ozone is poisonous, and the smell is associated more with laser printers. The CLR had had complaints in its early days about its distinctive smell, but despite complaints and concerns, and a few studies nothing untoward was ever found. Large wooden cabins were built in ticket halls that created the ozone and added it to the air being fed to the platforms. A promotional photograph showed a man holding a handkerchief in the air streaming from one of the new ducts, perhaps to demonstrate the force of the air being used.

An example of the details plans that were submitted to the government's railway inspectors for approval was shown next, this being for the pair of escalators installed at Oxford Circus in 1914. As was usual for the time, the escalators had 'shunt' landings at the end that forced passengers to step sideways; this was because the groove and comb that is familiar today had not been invented, and there were concerns about the trapping of feet at the ends of the machines.

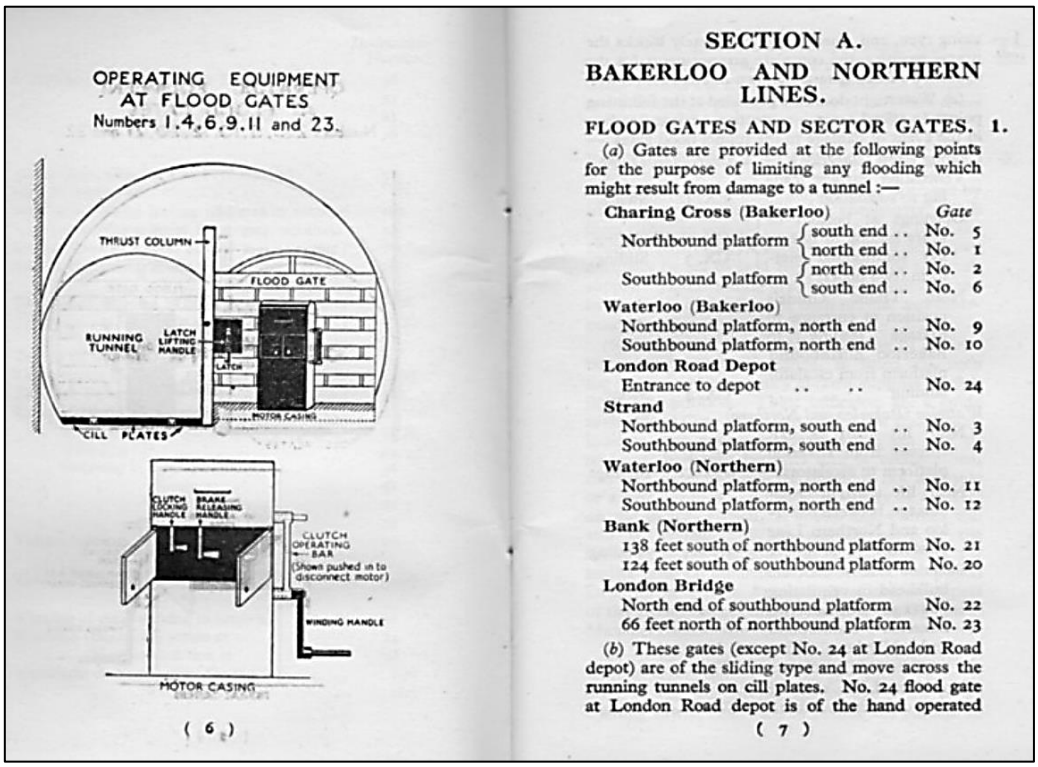
The plans showed how there would be one ascending escalator, with a straight boarding landing at the bottom and a shunt at the top, and a reversible escalator with shunt landings at both ends. This would normally descend, but could be reversed if the ascending escalator was out of order. One advantage of the shunt landings at this station was that they were used to guide passengers into the one-way system of passageways at the lower level. At the upper level, passengers would pass through the booking hall, with five windows for the purchase of tickets, and then through onto the escalator.

Our next document was from a book of gradient diagrams for the Underground as it was in 1920 – the date coming from the blueprint diagrams themselves. This had been held at Golders Green depot for a number of years, and was rescued from a skip following a clear-out. The two diagrams that were shown were for the Hampstead Tube from Charing Cross (now Embankment) to Golders Green. These clearly showed the almost-continuous uphill gradient (as steep as 1 in 60) preventing the use of the humped profile preferred by the tube companies as it accelerated trains away from stations, and decelerated those on the approach. It also showed that platforms were mostly level or on a gradient of 1 in 300, and included North End station (also known as Bull & Bush).

From the General Strike of 1926 we saw a pass issued to a volunteer allowing them access to Neasden Power Station. This was a period when staff were on strike and as well as the military, members of the public volunteered to help keep services running.

A technical drawing of the new subsurface ticket hall constructed at Chancery Lane in 1934 showed how sewers and Post Office tunnels had to be rerouted around the new structure. It was a tight squeeze fitting everything beneath the road and pavements of High Holborn, with the sewer cutting directly beneath the upper flight of steps on the north-east corner of the station.

The next documents came from the collection of the late Mike Horne. They showed how, when the Central Line was extended east of Liverpool Street, the reversing sidings were altered. The junction for the sidings was at the eastern end of the platforms, which needed to be extended. A crossover tunnel at the western end precluded the work from being done here, so the platform extensions cut though the original junctions, with a new junction being formed beyond. As a result, a Y-shaped section of tunnel remained between the new running tunnels east of the station, and a second plan showed how the space was repurposed as a Car Examiner's Room, and a mess room and tool room for Permanent Way staff, as well as providing a walking route through to the new pair of reversing sidings which avoided the need to walk in the main running tunnels.



During the Second World War, once the need to permit sheltering was accepted by the authorities, guidance leaflets were issued to those using the stations, and one of these was seen next, instructing shelterers on how to stay safe in stations. For staff, a number of special rule books were issued (some for LPTB staff only; others covering the main-line companies as well). We were shown a set of these, together with the operating instructions for the floodgates that were installed on the under river sections of the network. A location plan of the floodgates (marked SECRET in red) was also shown.

***Above**: Floodgate diagram from the wartime rule book.*

Remaining in World War Two, and back on the eastern extension of the Central Line, a factory for aircraft components was set up in the completed but unused tunnels between Leytonstone and Gants Hill, for the Plessey Company. The speaker showed a map of the tunnels with the various access points (stations and ventilation shafts) marked, and indicating the facilities at each for the factory workers – for example, canteens, materials access points, air conditioning. Cross-sections of the factory were also shown, demonstrating how the narrow-gauge railway was just squeezed in past the machinery, and how fresh air was provided to the workers.

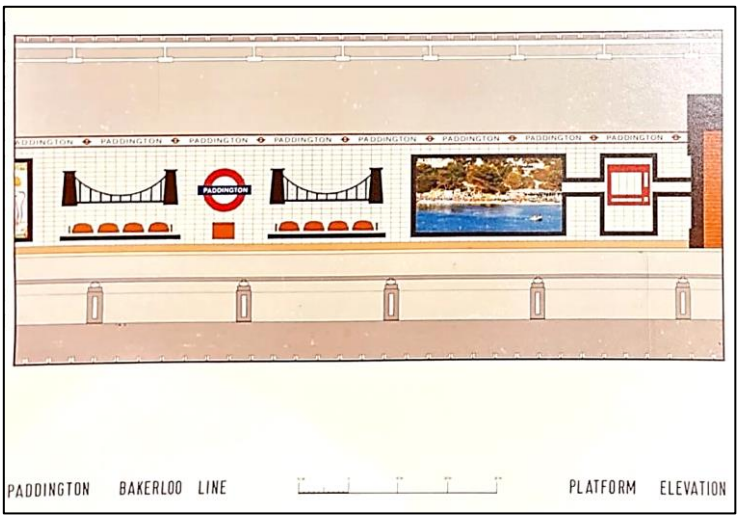
A decade after the war finished, a sports competition was arranged between London Transport and the Paris Métro. We saw brochures for the match *(Left),* together with the itinerary for a tour of Paris by the LT staff. LT even provided special luggage tags for their staff! *(Postscript: Amanda Griffiths has sent a scan of the event report taken from the London Transport Magazine. This has confirmed that the visitors from London beat their Parisian hosts in all three areas of athletics, rifle shooting and table tennis).*

Continuing the overseas theme, we were shown next a report written following a visit to various public transport operators in Italy, made in May 1962. The report was particularly charming, being carefully written and illustrated by the tour leader, and providing amusing vignettes of their travel to and from Italy via France, as well as their impressions of the companies and facilities that were visited.

The LMA collection includes a large number of historic photographs, and our speaker showed us an example taken outside Stockwell, dated 1970, showing the building prior to its reconstruction for the

Victoria Line. It was still on the footprint of the original C&SLR station, although with a new façade constructed in the 1920s. This set of photographs is very interesting, not only for the station building shown, but also for the details of people, cars, and street furniture that have since changed considerably. The penultimate document shown at the meeting was very hard to see clearly, but the speaker had added highlighting to bring it to life. It was a plan for the proposed layout of Aldwych station had the Fleet Line been extended there, as originally envisaged. The plan showed how escalators were to descend westward from a sub-surface ticket hall to a mid-level concourse, from which a new footbridge over the Piccadilly Line platforms would be provided, with steps leading down to the platforms. A further bank of escalators would descend from this mid-level to the platform level of the Fleet Line, with a trio of cross-passages linking the lower landing level to each platform. The original lifts and passageways to the Piccadilly Line platforms would all have been closed had this come to fruition.

Finally we were shown a station refurbishment plan for Paddington Bakerloo Line station. The speaker explained how these books were created for proposed refurbishments in the 1980s, with a lot of care going into the design of the books. Many were A3, spiral-bound, landscape format, although some A4 books also exist. The book for Paddington started with the scope for the work, and provided plans of the station at various levels. There were then a series of illustrations of the proposed tiling design, which was to be based of the achievements of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. A chain motif was to run along passageway and platform walls – perhaps inspired by the famous photograph of Brunel in front of a huge reel of chains for one of his ships, the *SS Great Eastern*. The platform walls also featured pictures of other works by Brunel, including a stylized image of the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the portal of Box Tunnel. Of course, the station was retiled in the mid-1980s, but with a theme based on tunnelling machines.



***Above**: (Left) Unrealised proposal for redecoration of Paddington (Bakerloo) platforms in 1983, with Brunel theme (see Box Tunnel portal on left).*

***Above**: (Right) More of the Paddington proposal, with an image of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.*

All illustrations are from the collection of Antony Badsey-Ellis

Given the eclectic nature of the talk, there were few questions, and our speaker was thanked in the usual manner.