

HIDDEN LONDON : CHARING CROSS

ACCESS ALL AREAS

by Roger Tuke

I managed yet another LTM Hidden London tour on the morning of 7 December 2023. This tour I had previously passed by as I thought I knew the Jubilee Line areas well, both from my late father working on the construction of them and then using these fairly regularly from the late-1970s through to their closure in 1999. However, having seen the Hidden Hangouts episode for Charing Cross on YouTube, it revealed some other areas I'd never had the chance to visit, so I thought I'd see what was there to see, as well as a surprise as it turned out.

The tour group were met by three Hidden London tour guides, Scott, Marilyn and to keep the group safe, Neil, in the basement circulating area immediately in front of the gate line under the forecourt of the Charing Cross mainline station and hotel. Here we observed this spacious new 1970s subterranean ticket hall area, that sadly lost its bright primary coloured cladding post the King's Cross fire, for rather a more bland neutral corporate tiling scheme.

We went through the gate line and down the first public escalator and assembled at the circulating area at its base where we were briefly informed of the station's history and the various names it has carried. I'm sure there no need to go into a detailed history here, but suffice to say a station by the name of Trafalgar Square opened on the Baker Street & Waterloo Railway (today's Bakerloo Line) in March 1906 and another close by with the name of Charing Cross on the Charing Cross, Euston & Hampstead Railway (part of today's Northern Line) in June 1907. This second station was renamed Charing Cross (Strand) in April 1914, and officially renamed as just Strand in 1915. At the same time the little used station a short distance away eastwards that was also called Strand, on the Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton Railway, was renamed Aldwych. The 1870 Charing Cross station a short walk south opened by the Metropolitan District Railway was finally renamed named Embankment in 1976.

The Charing Cross station of today came about with the building of the Fleet Line (renamed the Jubilee Line before opening in 1979) south from Baker Street through stations at both Bond Street and Green Park in the 1970s, terminating at Charing Cross with significant overrun tunnels and taking the opportunity to amalgamate the Bakerloo's Trafalgar Square and the Northern Line's Strand stations into one new station complex.

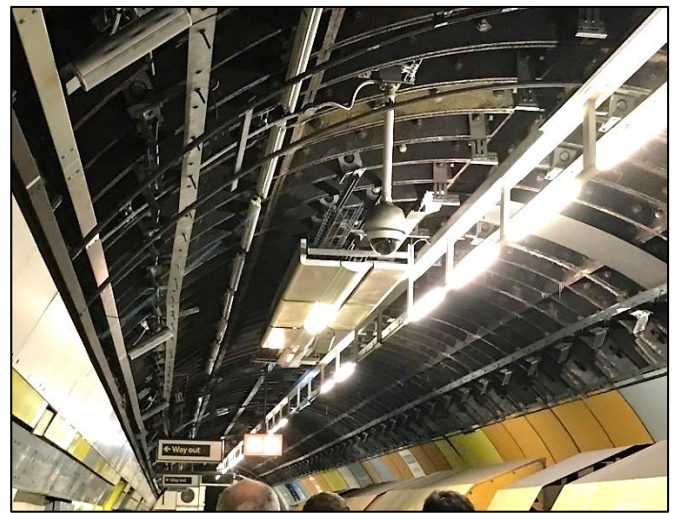
However, as the Jubilee Line was then extended as the JLE in the 1990s on a different alignment eastwards to the former docks and onto Stratford, from that envisaged in the 1970s Fleet Line proposals, Charing Cross as a Jubilee Line station was abandoned in late 1999. The Jubilee Line areas had a short 20-year public operational life. The Bakerloo and Northern lines continue to serve the station and the Jubilee Line platforms remain for occasional stabling of stock for enhancement of service when required, or in the event of disruption, as well as for filming purposes, as they represent a fairly modern Underground environment compared with most other disused or abandoned stations.

We went through the left-hand pair of locked doors in the wall that were built across the circulating area in 1999 and walked down one of the two Jubilee Line escalators to the platform at the lower-level circulating area. Here we could see first-hand the 1970s decor, bright green, yellow, orange walls and terrazzo floor tiles which have the three line colour flecks in, brown, black and grey to represent the three line colours of the station. There was more to see though for the curious observer, the "nicotinell" advert signage below the no smoking signs, odd and incorrect signage for other lines left from



various film uses, various mock but realistic adverts both on escalators and track side panels again from filming use, Jubilee Line signage from the station's opening in 1979 and from a glance towards platform 4, a yellow train with the word *Schweerbau* on its side. So through onto Platform 4 and stabled in the

platform “not to be moved” during traffic hours was a three-section rail grinding unit between two locomotives, being a very convenient central location for its stabling outside of engineering hours (*Opposite*). The other platform 3 was being kept free for Jubilee Line use if needed. Our guides pointed out numerous examples of design mock ups still present on this platform, most of which have been trialled here before rolling out on the network, although some remain unique and have never seen the light of day in use. Yellow bands above side station name frieze and yellow cross tunnel bands by exit subways, humped level access platform boarding areas, various different overhead lighting sections, emergency intumescent lighting strips along platform edge. Other things to note were the removal of the 1970s ceiling panels, again post King’s Cross fire, and due to the platforms’ lack of future operational use, no reinstatement with new. This revealed cast tunnel lining segments with S&S-E 1972 and 1973 dates, the manufacturer being Stanton & Staveley of Derbyshire. There was also a lifting beam over the platform and running track which we were informed has been put in to aid with filming use. We then journeyed through the cross passage onto platform 3 and noted that all of David Gentleman’s artwork, which was once visible on opening, has been covered over with black blank posters, yet again to facilitate filming.



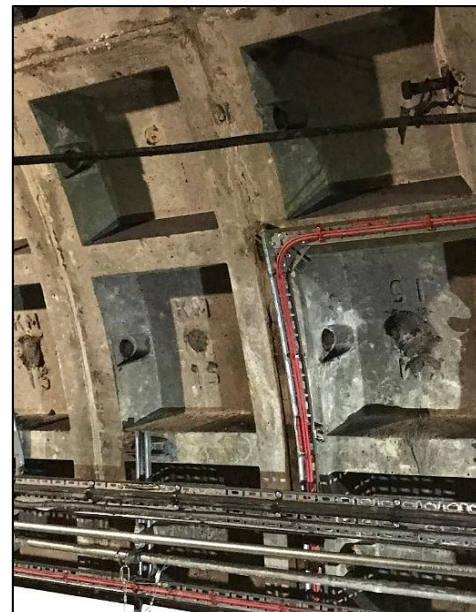
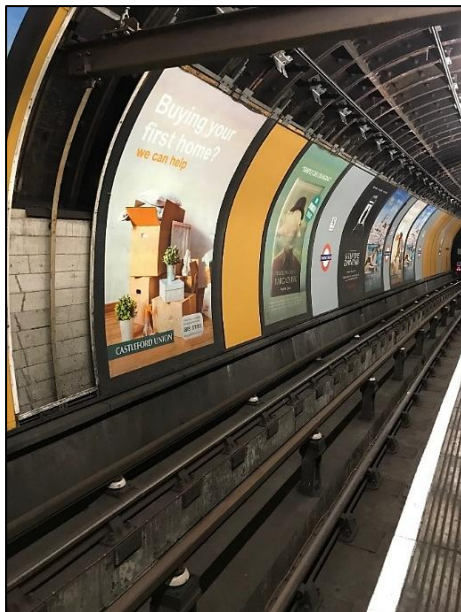
Above: Platform 4 tunnel segments by Stanton & Staveley.

Above: (Top Right) Filming equipment lifting beam Platform 4.

Above: (Right) Lighting mock-up.

We then came back into the lower circulating area between the two sets of escalators and were treated to a few extract clips on a large screen of the many adverts, music videos and films that have used the station as a setting. We saw excerpts from *The Bourne Identity*, *Paddington the Movie* and *Skyfall*, with both Daniel Craig as James Bond and Paddington the Bear having their own unique styles of descending the escalators. In fact, looking at the western escalators, one could see the ‘Toblerone’ shaped signage bases between flights and the studs on the handrail had been removed to facilitate the sliding down escapades of James Bond. Interestingly, we were informed that the crew for *Skyfall* spent some four months at Charing Cross filming and there were up to 400 people involved on a given day, no mean logistical exercise in its own right, but this brings in valuable revenue for TfL.

We then walked up the fixed stairs between the western escalators and looked back to see mock Temple station roundel signage and signs “to District and Circle Line” platforms, again both hangovers from Skyfall we were told.

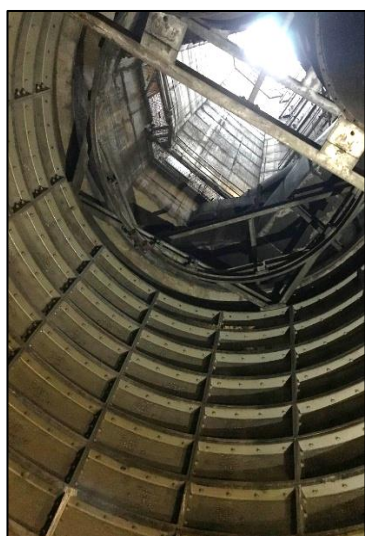


Above: Eastern mid-level with mock filming directional signage.

Above: (Centre) Platform 4 with mock filming adverts.

Above: (Right) Concrete segments with KM visible.

We then headed through a pair of locked grille mesh doors into a most interesting area, being a lengthy work tunnel that leads diagonally underneath Trafalgar Square to the site of the National Gallery Sainsbury Wing. Given the nature of the reconstruction of the area in front of Charing Cross mainline station for the Fleet Line in the 1970s and the very restricted access and built-up area, the site of the subsequent National Gallery extension, a WW2 bomb site, although distant, was the main work site. This I remember well, as well as being the hub of temporary offices for the third Fleet Line southern works contract, it was where most of the tunnelling spoil went out and materials came in. This lengthy tunnel starts off with concrete tunnel segments around a curve, then the usual cast segments for its main straight length again bearing S&S-E makers identification but this time with dates of 1964 and 1965, suggesting they were left over stock from the construction of the Victoria Line. We were informed that this tunnel had its own contractor's railway in and ends in a curve once again using concrete segments, which all bear the KM identification of the tunnelling contractor for this contract – Kinnear Moodie. A concrete wall across the tunnel prevents access beneath the subsequent National Gallery extension.



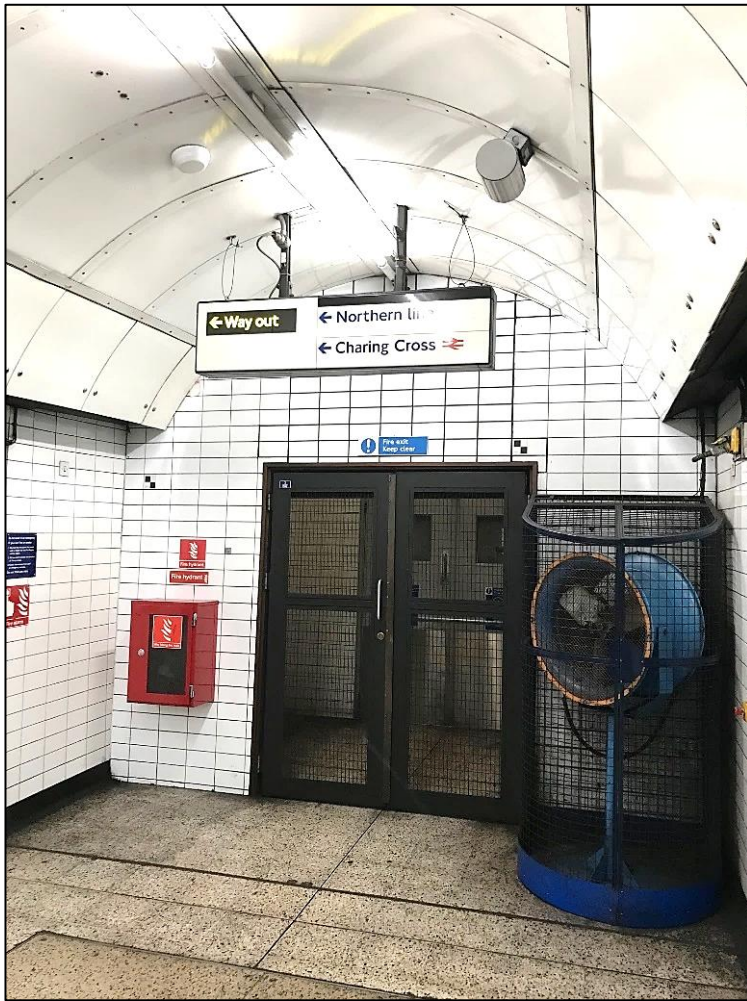
Above: Former work shaft in Craven Street, now ventilation shaft.

Above: (Centre) Works tunnel.

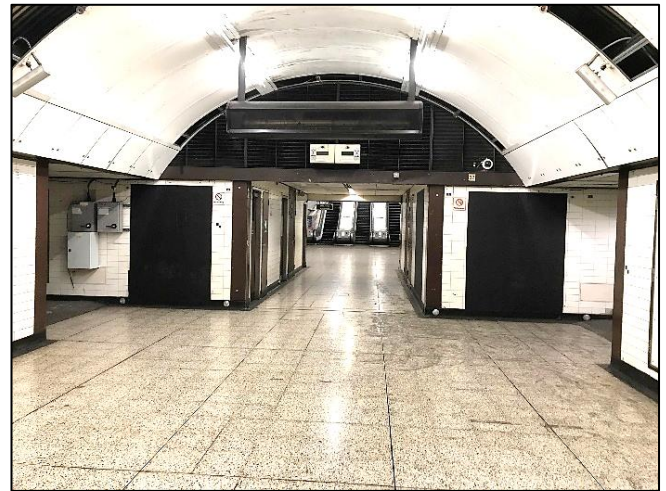
Above: (Right) End of works tunnel under National Gallery.

Retracing our steps back to the station's subterranean passages, we were offered access with hard hats, through locked louvered doors into the substantial ventilation tunnels constructed at the same time to aid air flow from existing tube lines. We were led up a ramped tunnel and onto grille decks over either the northbound or southbound Northern Line platforms and could view clearly both passengers on the platforms and the train roof when one came into the station. Finally, we were taken to see the base of the other work shaft, subsequently used as a ventilation shaft which is located on Craven Street. It is some 169ft tall, almost as tall as Nelson's Column in neighbouring Trafalgar Square, and has a distinctive but rather blank design (it was pictured on page 727 in *Underground News* No.744). This shaft was internally largely comprised of cast tunnel rings bearing the Stanton & Staveley maker's marks with dates of 1972 and 1973, suggesting clearly that this again was an early part of the works contract for Charing Cross station redevelopment.

After a one-and-a-half-hour tour in total we then went back up the lower Jubilee Line escalator shaft fixed stairs to the mid-level circulating area and up the in-use escalator to the ticket hall, where we thanked our guides for a most informative and different tour before being allowed out through the gate line.



Above: Entrance to works tunnel.



Above: (Top Right) Lower-level circulating area.



Above: (Right) Platform 3.

All photos: Roger Tuke