

HIDDEN LONDON : BAKER STREET THE WORLD'S FIRST UNDERGROUND

by Roger Tuke

All photographs © Roger Tuke

This is the newest LTM Hidden London real tour and I booked a ticket for early afternoon on 13 September 2023. This tour is a bit different from most I've been on: instead of visiting a section of a station that has lain unused by the public since a station was rebuilt, this one visits a cluster of disused spaces that involves unlocking a lot of doors from public areas that you would have no idea concealed such spaces.

The tour group were met by three Hidden London tour guides, the ever enthusiastic Esa (I sincerely hope I've spelt his name correctly), Emily and, to keep the group safe, Anthony, by the statue of Sherlock Holmes outside the front of the Grade II Listed station and Chiltern Court, more of which later on in the tour. We then entered the station off the approach (former cab) road, down stairs and through the gate line. Baker Street station has been serving the public for 160 years and has the honour of having the most platforms of any Underground station – ten.

First up was a visit through a locked door from the area on the other side of the gate line before reaching the bridge over the Hammersmith & City/Circle Line (original Met. Railway) platforms. This area, we were informed, was a disused goods bridge dating from 1910 over the platforms. In this space we were told the station's name may be due to builder William Baker who laid out the road of the same name or possibly land owner Edward Baker. When the station first opened on the Metropolitan Railway in 1863, we were told 40,000 passengers were carried on the first day.



Back out, we then crossed over the Hammersmith & City tracks by the public footbridge and down the stairs onto platform 6, the westbound H&C. About half way along the platform, another door was unlocked which provided access into a series of confined musty smelling small damp rooms, these including what was thought to be a waiting room with fire place (*Left*), a toilet room with some tiling remaining and another small room with clear witness marks of a staircase, suggesting these areas were one of two initial entrances to the original station, access in this case being from the south side of the Marylebone Road, although no drawings exist to confirm such supposition. Whilst in these spaces, our guides played a couple of voice recordings using words from an early traveller and a Times journalist about the experience of travelling on the Metropolitan Railway in its early years. It was confirmed that within six months of opening 26,000 passengers were carried each day.

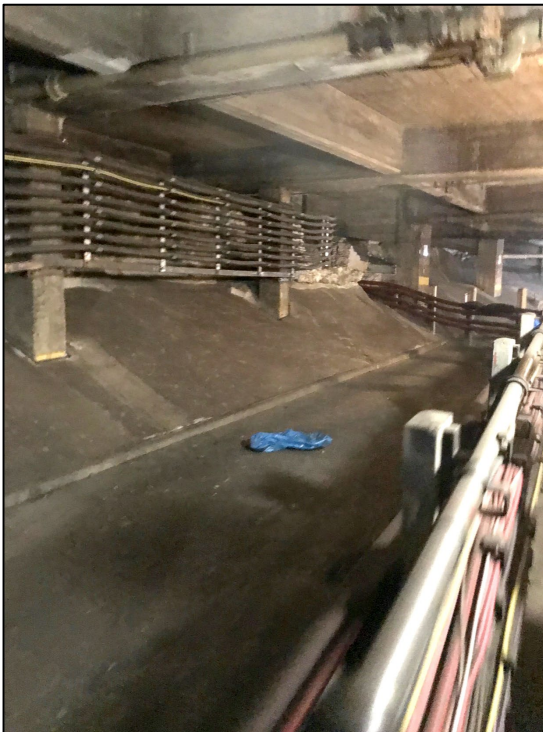
Back out onto platform 6 and the public footbridge over the tracks at the western end of the platforms was pointed out. Whilst it has separate crests with MR and 1911 on (*Opposite*), we were informed that this bridge opened in 1913, following indecision from the Met. as to whether it was a local railway from west London into the City or whether via its Metropolitan & St John's Wood Railway of 1868 to Swiss Cottage, its prime objective was to open up travel towards the north-west – Harrow in 1880, Aylesbury, Verney Junction, Watford and Uxbridge in turn. Encouraging



the commuter from Buckinghamshire towns and the new suburbs that would follow, known as Metro-Land. It was explained that the two different stations, one serving the original Met platforms (today's H&C) and those serving the Met. platforms towards St John's Wood known, initially as Baker Street East, were joined together as one enlarged station at this time to attempt to solve capacity issues, as well as a junction offering through trains from St John's Wood to the city and offering the property development opportunity seized by the Met's architect Charles W. Clark in his design for a grand station, a Met. Railway HQ, Selbie House, a hotel, shops and a

cab road. Execution of his full design was delayed by WW1, the hotel subsequently becoming Chiltern Court, comprising 150 luxury flats and ground floor restaurant (today's Wetherspoons Metropolitan Dining Rooms).

We crossed this footbridge noting the cream tiling with a dark green band and golden-brown skirtings and dado, onto platform 5, the eastbound H&C, noting the 1980s restoration of these two original platforms to re-create the effect of how they would have appeared in 1863 complete with embossed plaques in seat recesses. We then took the public ramped passageway up to Met. platform 1, noting the wonderfully preserved Metropolitan Railway Chiltern Court advert promoting London's Newest Restaurant at Baker Street Station. From here, we went down to the interchange concourse area below the Met. platforms which display a 1980s tiling scheme and which leads to the escalators to the Bakerloo and Jubilee lines.



Here, another door was unlocked which gained access for the tour party underneath the current Met. platforms known as "the cathedral" due to its vast space with arches created by the 1911-13 rebuilding of the station supporting the development above, complete with left over foundation ruins from the original station, many live cable runs (*Left*), together with the sounds of rumbling of trains and tannoy messages echoing from above.

Next, having exited back onto the interchange concourse we were informed of a brief history of the Baker Street & Waterloo Railway, today's Bakerloo Line. The tour party made its way down the Bakerloo escalator but headed along the corridor towards platform 7, the southbound Jubilee. We were then led through a pair of louvre grille doors which were unlocked for us into the disused passageways and former lift shaft areas of the Bakerloo Line dating from 1906. We were told the Baker Street & Waterloo Railway had a difficult start in life, via 1893 Act, started construction 1898-1901 but then stopped as company ran out of funds, being bought by Charles Tyson Yerkes, the disreputable American financier

that came to the UK bought the Metropolitan District Railway, as well as what we know today as the Bakerloo, Piccadilly and the Charing Cross branch of today's Northern Line.

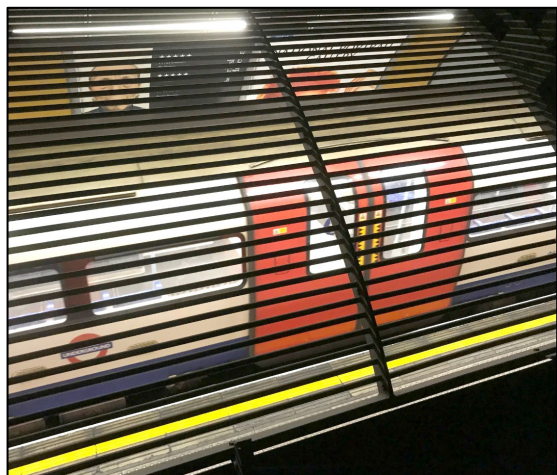
The initial Bakerloo Line opening between Baker Street and Kennington Road (later Westminster Bridge Road and today's Lambeth North) before being extended quickly to Elephant & Castle and later westwards in 1913 onto Paddington, then in 1915 via Warwick Avenue, Madia Vale and Kilburn Park to Queens Park. The Met. also constructed the Stanmore branch, which opened in 1932, but this just added to the congestion and, following formation of LTPB in 1933, the New Works Programme provided new local line tunnels from Baker Street to Finchley Road and a new southbound platform, but no

additional platform for the northbound branch traffic though, the junction being north of the existing platform. The Bakerloo Line uses these as a branch to project northwards over the Metropolitan Line tracks, substituting for a proportion of the local service.

The original Bakerloo Line station was one of around 45 stations with standardised branding, designed by Leslie Green and clad in the oxblood terracotta so familiar still today. However, this building is long gone. It was on the north side of Marylebone Road in Upper Baker Street, roughly where the Baskin Robbins shop is sited today. The two Bakerloo platforms were built one on top of each other, northbound over southbound which necessitated a one-way system resulting in what is known as “the horseshoe” corridor. Due to overcrowding, escalators came into use in 1914 up to the interchange concourse, but lifts stayed in situ little used until 1940 and were then used once more in 1946 for the WW2 victory parade. After this they were removed, reused at Highbury on the Northern City Line station, and the two disused lift shafts converted into ventilation shafts (*Below, Left*).



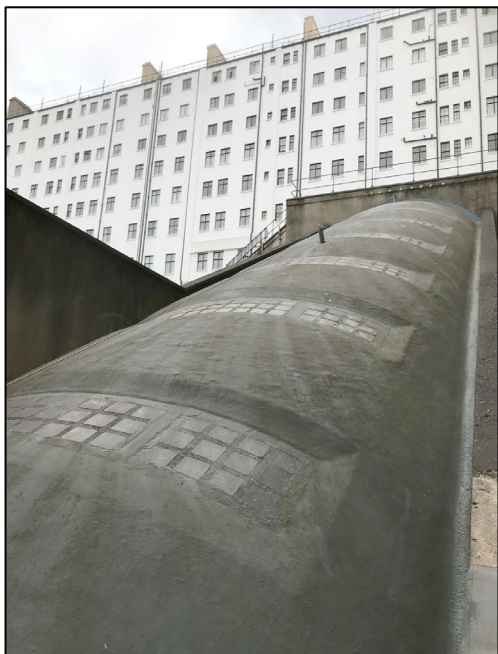
Changes were again made in 1979, when the two branches were separated and the one northbound platform and two southbound platforms were supplemented with a further northbound platform and the Stanmore branch became part of the proposed Fleet Line, renamed the Jubilee Line before opening southwards to Charing Cross. In the original Bakerloo lift and stairs passageways are extensive intact original wall tiling by W.B. Simpson & Sons in cream, light turquoise blue, a slightly darker turquoise blue, and white in colour (*Above, Right*), although between lift shaft entrances there’s a very small section with a green horizontal band between the cream and white tiles. This is not mentioned in *Tiles Of The Unexpected* book as it only deals with an area of the northbound platform since lost to a retiling scheme in the early 1980s.



The guides explained its presence is a mystery. Within the lift corridors are two large manually operated steel baffle gates, one in the corridor was open (*Left*) but another was closed, our guides opened this temporarily so we could walk in a short stub corridor and look down on to the southbound Jubilee platform 7 (*Far Left*), clearly seeing passengers waiting and the roof of a train once it arrived.

After the ability to walk around these passageways and view into the base of one of the disused lift shafts, the party was then escorted back into the public passages and up an escalator to the interchange

concourse again and then up an escalator to ticket hall level noting the glass block roof lights providing daylight into the escalator shaft (*Below*).



We then exited through the gate line and returned to the foot of the stairs originally used to enter the station earlier and through another locked door into passageways that lead to staff offices. This was the first area your reviewer had been in before as a good friend has worked in offices here. We were taken into a light well adjacent to the Metropolitan Line platform 1, and could look up and see the rear of Chiltern Court and the Met. HQ office block in Allsop Place and see the top side of the upper escalator shaft we had just travelled up complete with its glass block roof panels. The party was informed that the LT Lost Property Office was located here from 1933 until it vacated the site for South Kensington in 2019; the Canteen Training School was also sited here (a picture dating from 1959 showed it); the Recruitment Centre was another occupant, and more recently BTP and Revenue offices have used space here. On the way back along the passages, we stopped outside a door sign written Resident Engineer and were told inside for many years was the LT Rifle Club, complete with social space and a rifle range, in fact

passing on the way out we saw small stub corridors used for pistol shooting. Once back to the ticket hall after over an hour in total, the guides were thanked for allowing us to see some of the very different fascinating history that this grand old station has to show.