



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF EAST FINCHLEY UNDERGROUND STATION

Behind the Line

It's sad but probably true that most travellers take their local tube station and its staff totally for granted. Yet the complexity of getting trains through London and back boggles the mind. Claire Wilmans investigates.

Because East Finchley Station is a 24-hour operation it is hard to see where one day ends and the next begins. The first driver and guard (a crew) book in at 04.45 at one of the depots at Highgate, High Barnet, Golders Green, Edgware or Morden. They are the reservoirs which feed trains into the Northern Line system each day. Every train has its own number on the front and follows the same route and schedule, or duty, each day. The crew boards the train assigned to them and runs through a list of safety checks in much the same way pilots check their planes before take off. Once they are satisfied all is well, they take their train onto the track and into service at 05.30.

Frequently, a new timetable comes into effect. Before this, a dedicated London Transport Department sits down with a powerful computer and works out the number of runs up and down the branches of the Northern Line each of its 84 trains must follow each day and night to meet the timetable so customers can go where they want, when they want. This task is doubly complex because they must also ensure crews work no more than 78 hours in any two week period and that the duties get crews to those few Northern Line stations which have canteens at the right times for meal breaks.

Direct Line

Once the duty schedules have been worked out it is over to East Finchley's three duty managers to run everything "train-side" and keep crews and duties to the timetable by sorting out any delays or problems which come up and calling into service the spare crews East Finchley keeps on standby to cover as and when necessary.

East Finchley's four station supervisors manage the station staff and all things "station-side", meaning customers and anything to do with platforms and ticket hall. Station supervisors, as well as the Duty Managers, are on hand 24 hours a day to deal with anything from a track inspection if a driver reports something unusual to advising customers on the best way to get to Swakeley's Station.

Dawn patrol

At 05.30 the first of East Finchley's three station assistants comes in to present a smil-

ing face to the first customers. The first cleaner signs off having been at work since 22.30 picking up litter, washing the booking hall floor tiles or blacking steps which must be done when no-one is about so as to avoid accidents. The paper sellers set up their stall at 06.00 and the cafe opens its doors at 06.30 when the booking clerk takes up position to sell the 3,000 tickets bought at the station on average each day - 64,000 every four weeks. Staff estimate four times that number of customers come through East Finchley daily if you count season ticket and travelcard holders. With the shop opening at 07.00, the station is ready as the morning rush hour begins.

During this time, crews have been booking in at the Northern Line depots and taking trains into service as the number of trains working the track builds up to the morning peak. Between 07.30 and 09.30 there will be 84 trains at some point around the Northern Line. At 07.00 the duty manager and Station Supervisor who have taken the station through the night shift, change. At 08.00 the second station cleaner arrives to keep the bins on the station empty and the areas train-side, such as the mess room and the duty manager's office, spick and span.

From 08.30 crews begin changing over at East Finchley to let those on the first duties take a meal break at the canteen which for planning reasons (East Finchley station is a 1930s listed building) is that clutch of Portacabins you can see in the car park!

Peak Load

By now customer numbers are at their peak, trains are coming through to town at the rate of four every ten minutes and the office staff who work station-side are coming in. Two train crew managers (TCMs) run the day-to-day business, supported by two administrators. The pay clerk re-allocates duties to cover annual leave and people going on courses and supplies the TCMs with much of the information they use to run the business.

Drivers hold several licences in order to work and go on courses regularly to keep these safety critical licences, as they are known, up to date. These cover competence to drive a train, a medical, written and oral communication skills and knowledge of rules and regulations. All staff refresh track skills every two

years so they can deal with hazards and take customers along electrified track safely should the need arise.

At 09.30 the paper stall has sold out and the service winds down from the morning peak with 24 trains coming out of service and back to their depots to be swept, allowing crews to take lunch breaks. The type of customer also changes with bright-eyed senior citizens, families and others taking advantage of one-day travelcards giving unlimited trips in a day for £3.50.

Lunch comes and goes with some crews on early duties going home and fresh crews booking in to bring trains back into service for the afternoon peak between 16.30 and 18.30 when all 84 trains will be back in the system to get people home. At 13.00 the fruitseller and florist get to work outside and the cafe closes at about 15.00 once the lunchtime rush is over.

All change!

Mid afternoon and then again at 23.00 duty managers, station supervisors and station assistants change shifts. The second cleaner departs at 16.00. Office staff station-side leave at 17.30, the shop closes and the service begins to wind down for the night. A third cleaner comes in for an hour to keep things under control and then the first cleaner is back at 22.30.

There is a "second wave" of customers later in the evening as they come through East Finchley on their way to a night out. The last train northbound is at 00.55 and town bound at 00.09 after which the booking office and hall closes, the station assistant departs leaving the duty manager and the station supervisor on shift. By 01.30 the last crew has booked off and all trains are in their depots being cleaned, having their routine fortnightly check by train technicians or being serviced which is usually done at Morden or Golders Green.

At night, the network belongs to the engineers carrying out routine maintenance on track or tunnels which cannot be worked on whilst there is traffic around. Engineers also carry out work for the Northern Line project enlarging tunnels to accommodate the new carriages for one-man operation.

All too soon 04.45 rolls around and the cycle of life at East Finchley Station starts again.

BABYTALK

Mother's Help

By Edna Hobbs

The library isn't the first place you think of as a must for mothers, but our library offers help in a variety of ways.

Most obvious perhaps are all the books on pregnancy, birth and parenting. There are many very helpful manuals, but two unusual books stand out as of particular interest.

The first is *Dream Babies*, a look at baby manuals through the ages. Fashions come and go, some of the things mothers subjected their babies to believing that they were doing the right thing are really horrifying, like feeding them thin gruel instead of breast milk, which was thought to coarsen the spirit, or leaving them in near freezing

temperatures all day to harden them up. Seeing how wrong the "experts" have been through the ages makes it easier to trust your own judgement with confidence.

The other really interesting and helpful book is *Green Parenting*, this offers practical guidelines for bringing children up to be fulfilled human beings rather than mindlessly destructive consumers. I am not dedicated enough to follow all the measures suggested, but is so full of good ideas, that it will continue to be an inspiration.

Child minding

On sale in the library for £1 is a booklet called *Under Fives* in Barnet which gives information about everything to do with pre-schoolers in the borough. This includes clinics, childminders, recreation, advice, health, playgroups - names and addresses of contacts are all clearly listed.

To improve your child's mind, the library now sells laminated posters of, among others, the alphabet, numbers and nursery rhymes. They are all A3 size and sell for £2.50.

During the longer holidays special activities are arranged, like "Old MacDonald had a Farm" and "Teddy Bear's Picnic" this August. These are advertised by leaflet in the library.

Every Wednesday afternoon from 2.30 - 3pm there is a special storytime for under fives. And of course there is an excellent range of books and tapes to keep children of all ages entertained.

Toy time

For under £5 annually you can join the Toy Library, which meets upstairs every Friday (except August) from 2.30 - 4.30. Small toys cost under 50p to borrow and large ones - like seesaws and kitchen sets - under £1. This is a good way to test toys before buying and also gives your child access to a wide range of toys without breaking the bank or cluttering the home.

Church News

Christmas Fairs

St Mary's Catholic Church, Saturday 30 November from 10.30am onwards.

All Saints, Durham Road, Saturday 23 November.

Unity

As part of the call to Christian Unity there will be a talk and discussion on the Churches Together book "Called to be One".

This will be in the Wesley Hall, New Barnet on Tuesday 19 November at 8.00pm. The talk will cover the challenge to unity, renewal and the churches mission in the light of the Pope's encyclical letter. The speaker is Sister Cecily Boulding.

Churches Together in Finchley will have a talk on the Holocaust by Andrew Aarons at the Finchley Methodist Church in Ballards Lane, N3 on Thursday, 21 November at 7.45pm with slides and refreshments.

POETRY CORNER

Voyage

We lined the gunnel of the deck
All of us staring with sad happy faces
At a sunset frowning in a tranquil sea,
Where the ocean blended with the sky
And no-one spoke and nothing broke the silence
But the old ship's creaking like a restless tree,
Lost as we were in our memories.
And all around us a silent fleet
Of white sails shivering in the wind
That blew us to the other side
To a far horizon where a sun was setting
And we with it into eternity.

Paddy Coss, Vale Farm Estate