

The
**NORTH LONDON RAILWAY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



THE JOURNAL

ISSUE No

35

**WINTER
2003/2004**

WEST END LANE

John Downing

The Hampstead Junction Railway was opened in 1860 to provide a link between Camden Town and Willesden on the L.N.W.R. It provided an alternative route for traffic from the N.L.R., bypassing the L.N.W.R. main line south of Willesden.

When opened, much of the country the H.J.R. passed through was still largely rural and undeveloped. The area around West End Lane was fairly typical, with large country mansions and their estates adjoining a small hamlet at West End Green. The two nearest stations on the H.J.R. were Finchley Road and Brondesbury, both of which opened with the line in 1860.

It was not until 1888 that development in the area justified an H.J.R. station at West End Lane. By 1900 the large houses had been demolished and their estates built over with a network of streets, lined with a mixture of large town houses and smaller terraced cottages, most of which remain to this day.

Before the H.J.R. station opened two other stations had already opened close by, West End on the Midland main line in 1871 and West Hampstead on the Metropolitan (M&SJW) in 1879.

All three stations competed for traffic into the City. The Midland to Moorgate, the N.L.R., which provided the trains at West End Lane, into Broad Street and the Metropolitan, via Baker Street, to both the City and West End. In the country direction the lines diverged and did not compete for traffic.

West End Lane competed mainly with the Metropolitan which had the advantage of flexibility of destination through its connections at Baker Street. In 1905 the Metropolitan was electrified, which gave it the further advantage of fast clean modern trains. The H.J.R. was electrified in 1916 but its longer route mileage into the City and less frequent trains still left West End Lane at a disadvantage serving commuters into London. For leisure travel West End Lane had an advantage with out of town destina-

tions. Hampstead Heath, Kew Gardens and Richmond were all popular resorts, especially with day trippers, served only from West End Lane.

Despite an attempt to withdraw passenger services over the N.L.R. route between Richmond and Broad St. after the Beeching Report, the service survives and West End Lane remains open. The eastern terminus, though, is no longer Broad St. but North Woolwich. In 1967 West End Lane was renamed West Hampstead and attempts have been made to promote the three West Hampstead stations as a rail interchange. The narrow pavements and busy roads connecting the stations do not make this a very attractive proposition. Through ticketing is also a problem for those without a travelcard.

At the present time there is a 15 minute service Monday to Friday, falling to 20 minutes on Saturday and half hourly on Sunday. Until it was withdrawn in September 2002 the Anglia Railways London Crosslink service between Basingstoke and Colchester stopped at West Hampstead, no doubt to take advantage of the interchange.

From personal observation the station seems reasonably well used on weekdays. The unmanned station and 313 units that provide the service present a tatty and rundown appearance, that cannot do much to encourage passengers. The N.L.R. no longer competes with the other two stations for traffic to central London. In a way the service has returned to its origins, mimicking its freight traffic, offering a route around North London, with connections from Richmond to Stratford with the radial routes between London and the provinces.

Back Cover: Map of West End Lane area in 1935. The area is now completely built up with a network of streets lined with terraced houses and large town houses. The proximity of all three stations can be seen; both the Midland and Metropolitan have been widened, with the Great Central running alongside the Metropolitan.

Reproduced from the 1935 Ordnance Survey map



Above: West End Lane about 20 years after opening, with an N.L.R. 0-6-0 tank on a westbound freight. The station buildings consist of a brick built booking office at road level and timber framed waiting rooms on the platforms. The porter on the Broad Street platform is cleaning the ornate glass bowl on the lamp, which is lettered West End Lane and West Hampstead. The lady passenger sits on what looks like a standard L.N.W. Platform seat, flanked by the usual range of adverts. The entrance to the L.N.W. Goods and coal station is visible behind the platform on the other side of West End Lane. (Photo: David Hanson Collection) Below: In 1940. The lamp posts remain but the ornate glass tops have been replaced. The embankment behind the Broad Street platform is now occupied by Beck and Pollitzer, a shop and exhibition contractor. (Photo: David Hanson)





Above: The street level building in 1940. The bookstall closed during the war and never re-opened. Another wartime casualty was the canopy over the entrance which was not replaced. *(Photo: David Hanson Collection)*

Below: The refurbished station in 1953. The entrance is now the arch on the right, formerly occupied by the bookstall and the centre arch is now sealed off. After further modernisation in 1968 the booking hall was remodelled to allow one man operation. *(Photo: John Downing)*





Above: At platform level looking east in 1968. The platform buildings are being demolished as part of the modernisation and rationalisation program for the line. The platform buildings had been repaired and rebuilt in about 1950 after suffering some minor bomb damage during the war. (*Photo: Jim Connor*)

Below: In 1992. The replacement "bus shelter" platform building can be seen situated at the bottom of the stairs. (*Photo: John Downing*)



