

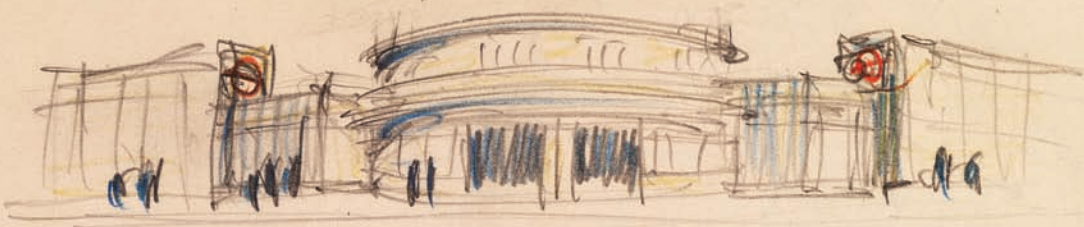
---

V&A + RIBA  
Architecture Partnership

---

# Underground Journeys:

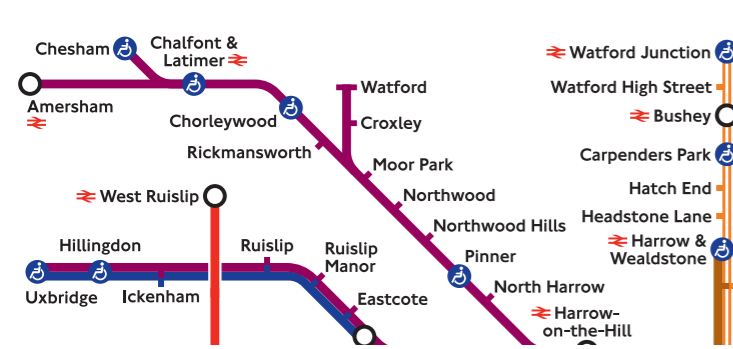
Charles Holden's designs  
for London Transport



RIBA  Trust



London  
Underground



**Uxbridge**

The development of rural Uxbridge into a growing suburb spurred a need to expand the existing underground station, which had opened in 1904 to serve the Metropolitan Railway. The concept for the new station originally was devised by architects Leonard Bucknell and Ruth Ellis, but due to rising costs, the project was scaled back. Taken on by Charles Holden, the proven model of the reinforced concrete shed used at Cockfosters was adapted for Uxbridge but made proportionately higher to accommodate the taller Metropolitan line trains. Opening in 1938, the new terminus signalled the end of the Metropolitan and Piccadilly lines, as well as a grand civic arrival into the town.

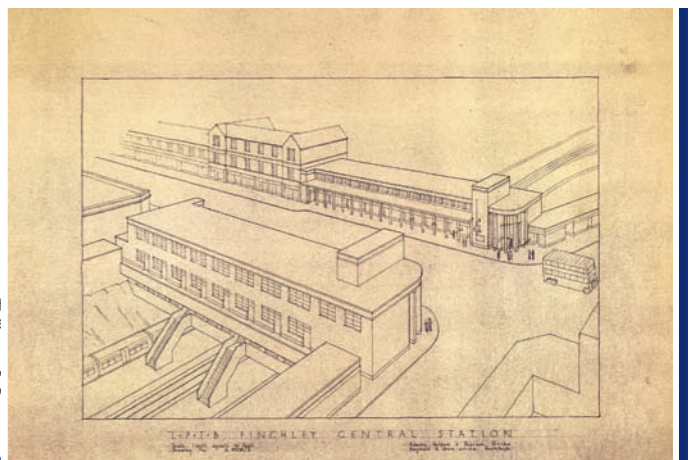
RIBA Library Photographs Collection



**Osterley**

Osterley station on the Piccadilly line was re-designed by Charles Holden and Underground architect Stanley Heaps. Opened in 1934, it replaced the original 1883 Osterley and Spring Grove station which needed modernising. Located on the busy Great West Road, the station is dominated by its tall ventilation tower and the finial mounted on top. Illuminated at night, the finial acts as a beacon for passing traffic.

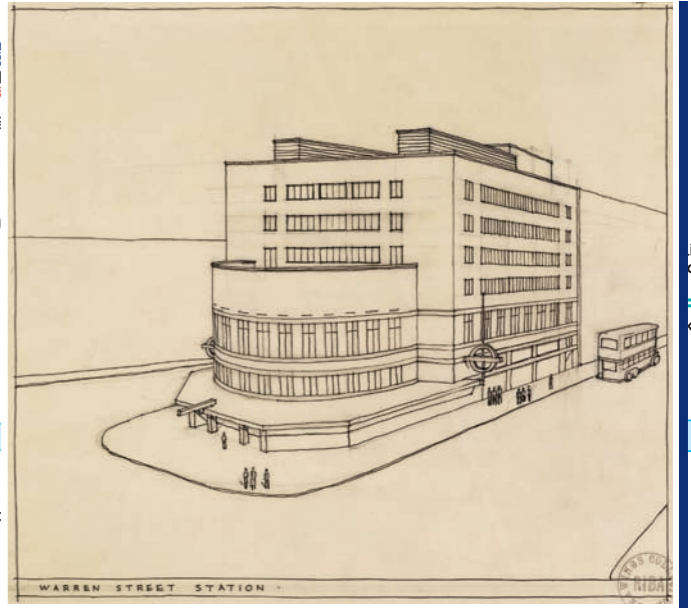
Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection



**Finchley Central**

Between 1937 and 1947, plans were made to rebuild the Victorian station previously known as Finchley (Church End). Charles Holden collaborated on the new designs with Reginald Uren whilst they designed Rayners Lane. Located below ground and beneath a bridge carrying Regents Park Road and Ballards Lane, various alternative designs were explored for the station buildings, including this plan that features a colonnade and short tower repeated on either side of the road. Due to lack of funds following the end of the Second World War, none of the new designs were ever executed, and the original Victorian station remains in use today.

RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection

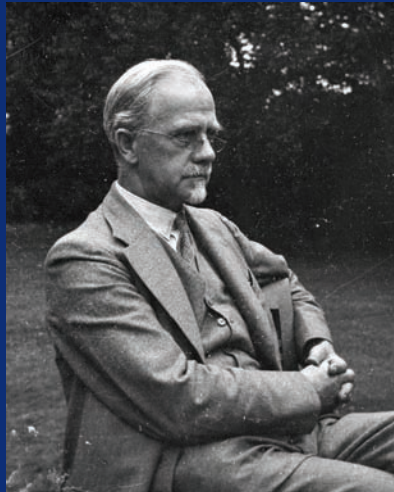


**Warren Street**

Originally opened in 1907 as Euston Road station serving the Charing Cross, Euston and Hampstead Railway, Warren Street was modernised during the 1930s with a new ticket hall, entrance and escalators. Initial designs were carried out by Charles Holden and then developed by the Underground architect Stanley Heaps. Located on a narrow corner site, the new facade is comprised of a half drum of Portland stone. A brick storey was added when an office building replaced the original station.

RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection





During the 1920s and 30s, London Underground symbolised modern Britain and Charles Holden's designs defined modern British architecture from this time. Working in collaboration with London Underground Managing Director Frank Pick, Holden was responsible for some of the finest public architecture in early twentieth-century London.

Pick wanted new structures which would reflect the efficient technological modernity of his growing transport system. Holden held similar views on architecture and design which had developed through a rather contradictory mix of treasuring the traditional, English Arts & Crafts ideals and a desire to return to elemental simple forms and exploring new technology that has been described as 'medieval modernism'. Pick was in many ways his ideal client, and their creative partnership produced Holden's best architectural work.

As consulting architect to the Underground and later London Transport, Holden designed more than 50 Tube stations built over a 25 year period, starting from 1924. At the time, it was the largest building programme in the capital shaped by a single architect since Christopher Wren rebuilt the City churches destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666.



## 1. Fitness for Purpose

Holden was an experienced architect when he began his Underground work for Pick, though he had never designed for transport. Having worked with Arts and Crafts architect C.R. Ashbee, he joined the practice of H. Percy Adams, establishing his reputation with buildings such as the Bristol Central Library and the British Medical Association in London.

Pick and Holden first met in 1915 as founder members of the Design and Industries Association (DIA), a group that brought together artists, architects, manufacturers and retailers intent on improving standards of design in British commerce. In all their work for the Underground they both followed the DIA's rigorous 'Fitness for Purpose' rule. Pick later commissioned Holden to redesign the facades of several underground stations and to design a pavilion to represent the Underground Group at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.

## **2. Moving Underground**

Holden's first Tube station series was for the southern extension of the Northern line from Clapham Common to Morden, opened in 1926. Initially, Stanley Heaps, head of the Underground's Architects Office, had created new designs for the stations, but following concerns raised by Pick, Holden took over the project. He developed a standard 'folding screen' entrance design that could be adapted to each site, whether it was freestanding or inserted into an existing building. The facades were in white Portland stone with large glazed areas and prominent Underground roundels. Floodlighting and bright internal illumination made each station stand out like a beacon on a dark street.

Around the same time, both Bond Street and St Paul's stations were rebuilt to handle the increase in passenger traffic. Holden used the same design elements he had developed for the Morden extension.

## **3. The Heart of London**

Piccadilly Circus, one of the busiest Tube stations in central London, was completely reconstructed in 1925-28. Built to replace the inadequate surface level booking hall and lifts, the new circular hall could accommodate 50 million passengers a year. Holden transformed this bleak cavern into a welcoming underground environment by creating what he called an 'ambulatory'. His design was more like a high class shopping arcade than a station, with window showcases and marble wall panelling. Piccadilly became the jewel in the Underground's crown, much admired by visitors to London.

Holden was already working on an even bigger scheme for a new Underground headquarters. Once completed 55 Broadway was the largest and tallest office block in London, built on an awkward triangular site over St James's Park station. Holden decided on a cruciform plan which gave street level access to the offices and station from both sides. The mass of the building was stepped up to a central tower, giving maximum daylight to all floors. This was London's first taste of American style office architecture, soon known as 'The Cathedral of Modernity'.

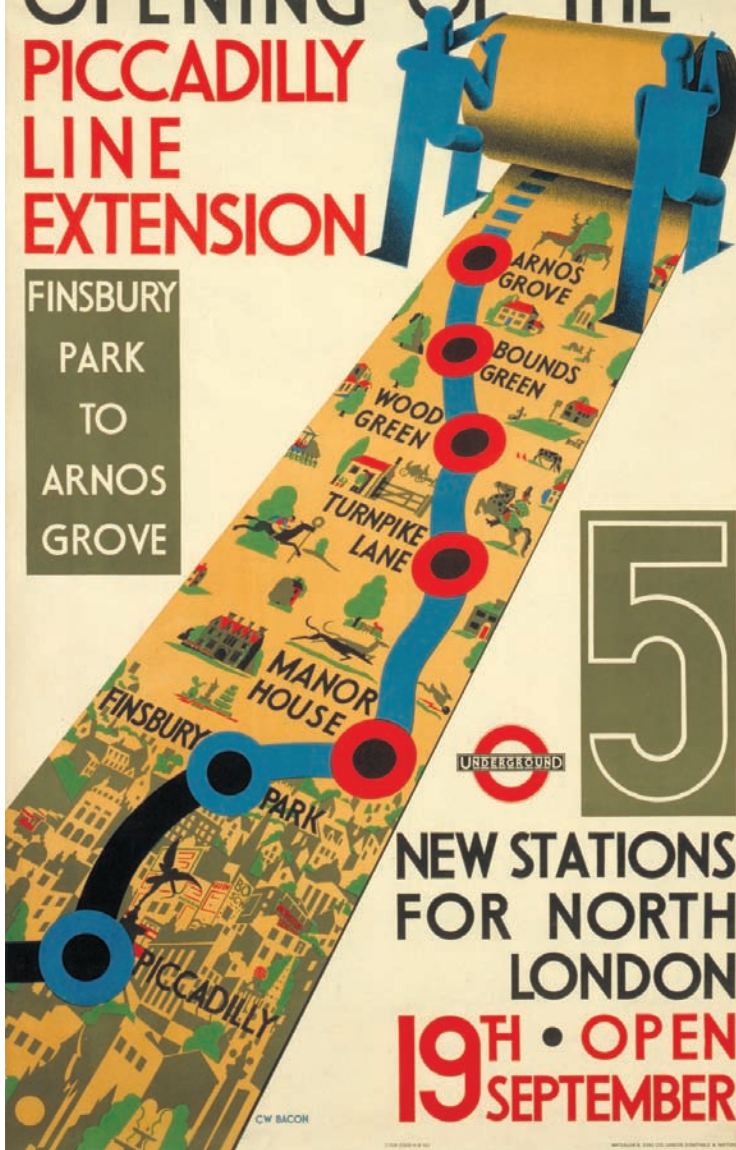
P2338/30 100



Impression of the new offices of the  
London Electric Railway Company, 55  
Broadway, London  
Drawn by David Muirhead Bone, 1927  
RIBA Library Drawings & Archives  
Collection

# OPENING OF THE PICCADILLY LINE EXTENSION

FINSBURY  
PARK  
TO  
ARNOS  
GROVE



5

NEW STATIONS  
FOR NORTH  
LONDON  
19<sup>TH</sup> • OPEN  
SEPTEMBER

## **4. Changing the face of London Underground**

In the early 1930s, Holden and Pick refined the elements of what soon became an instantly recognisable London Transport corporate design style. This was applied to new structures from bus shelters to Tube stations right across the city. It changed the face of London.

Before starting on this 'adventure', as Holden called it, he and Pick went on an architectural study tour of northern Europe in 1930. They particularly admired the work of Willem Dudok (1884-1974) in Holland and Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940) in Stockholm. These European influences became the framework of ideals, reflected in Holden's next station series for the Piccadilly line extensions, built from 1931-3.

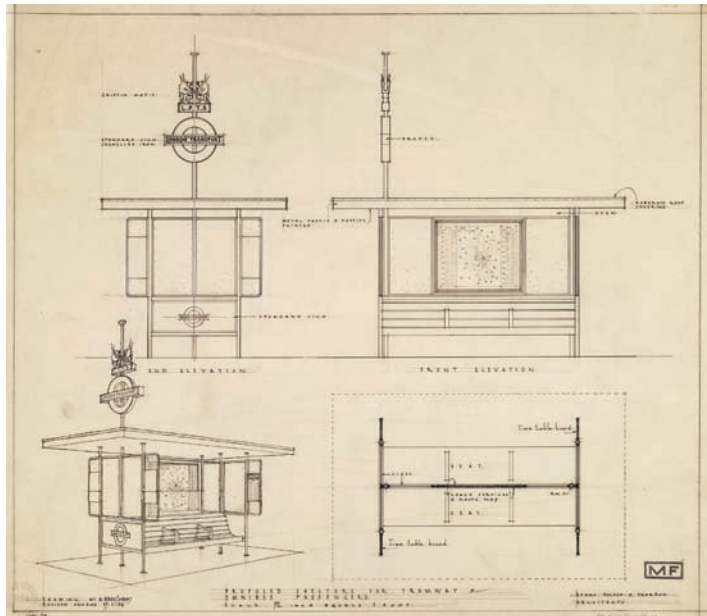
The prototype for what Holden modestly called his 'brick boxes with concrete lids' was Sudbury Town. This established a 'kit of parts' for new stations. Extended horizontal and vertical planes were used to create simple but bold forms and spaces. Traditional English brickwork was combined with smooth concrete, metal window frames and glazed tiling. Sometimes a tower was added or the box became a drum, as at Arnos Grove. Nearly all of these stations, generally considered Holden's finest, are now listed buildings.



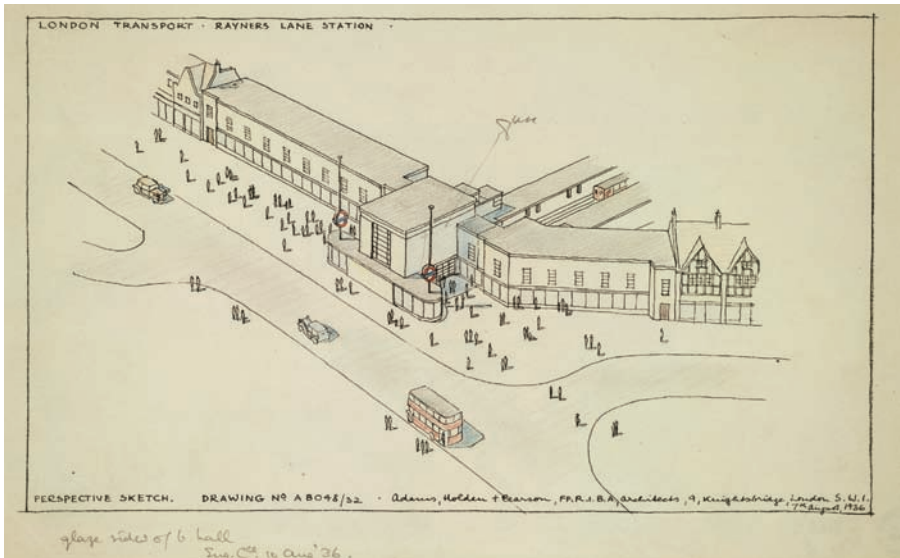
## 5. Integrated Design

Holden's holistic approach to the design of the Underground stations was encouraged by Pick's enlightened vision of a better urban environment.

Everything was carefully integrated, and Holden was given responsibility for the design of all fixtures and decoration above and below ground. This included lighting, tiling, clocks, litter bins, ticket machines and booths. He also incorporated the Underground's distinctive roundel, lettering and signage developed by Edward Johnston. Holden's design work was not limited just to the Underground. He also developed a series of prototypes for passenger bus and coach shelters and bus stop posts. He even attempted to re-design the LT-type bus. Although these ventures into product design are less well-known and not as successful as his station designs, they clearly illustrate the extent to which Holden and Pick worked to shape every physical aspect of the London Transport system.



Design for concrete  
bus stop shelter  
Charles Holden for Adams  
Holden & Pearson, c.1933  
RIBA Library Drawings &  
Archives Collection



## 6. 'Holdenesque'

In 1933 the Underground Group became part of a new public corporation, London Transport (LT), with Pick as Chief Executive. A major five-year New Works Programme was announced which included extensions and improvements to the Bakerloo, Northern and Central lines. Adams, Holden & Pearson were appointed consulting architects to the Board, and were soon working with LT's own architects and engineers on new stations such as Redbridge and Gants Hill.

Holden became less personally involved in the Underground work. In 1931, he had been awarded the RIBA London Architecture Medal for 55 Broadway. Due to the success of the Underground headquarters, Holden was chosen to design the new University of London complex in Bloomsbury.

The prestigious Senate House project now took up much of Holden's time, and some of the London Transport work was sub-contracted or carried out in partnership with other architectural practices. Pick was unhappy about this, as he felt that the LT work was becoming 'Holdenesque', following the general style Holden had set for the Underground but lacking his careful attention to detail.



## 7. Holden's Legacy

There is no doubt that the designs carried out by Holden for the Underground have had an impact on subsequent railway architecture. Holden's 'brick box with a lid' format was emulated by other architects designing for London Transport during the late 1930s and 1940s, and his functional style continues to be an influence with contemporary station designs such as Canada Water and West Ham on the Jubilee line extension. Recognised for his inspirational architecture, Holden was awarded the RIBA Royal Gold Medal in 1936. The early designs on the Piccadilly line extensions, along with 55 Broadway, are now regarded as modernist icons and have been recognised through their listed status awarded by English Heritage.

The legacy of the Holden and Pick partnership was (is?) considerable. Holden understood Pick's aspiration to produce work of the highest quality, and Pick's patronage enabled Holden to achieve it. But above all they shared a moral philosophy about how a building should work both aesthetically and practically. Together they developed a modern yet classic style of architecture which defined not only the image of London Transport but that of the capital itself.

## **Events**

---

### Seminars & Study Days

Inside Outing

Charles Holden: Underground Architecture

*Tuesday 16th November 10.30-16.00*

*Hochhauser Auditorium & London Underground Headquarters*

Take a trip into the architecture of the London Underground designed by Charles Holden during the 1920s and 30s. Be guided around the London underground headquarters on a private visit to view surviving Art Deco features and take a tour of the V&A's display, Underground Journeys: Charles Holden's designs for London Transport.

£46, £37 concessions (includes refreshments, excludes travel expenses)

Jointly organised with London Underground

### Curator-led talks & tours

Closer Look Architecture Talks

Travels on the Underground

*Tuesday 14 December*

*Meeting Point, Grand Entrance*

*13.00-14.00*

Join Fiona Orsini, curator of the Underground Journeys: Charles Holden's designs for London Transport display on a tour of the exhibition, followed by a chance to examine further drawings from the Adams Holden & Pearson collection of designs for London Transport.

## **Acknowledgements**

---

The V&A+RIBA Architecture Partnership wishes to express its thanks to London Transport Museum and London Underground for their help with Underground Journeys: Charles Holden's designs for London Transport and with this guide.

Curator: Fiona Orsini, RIBA Trust

Graphic designer: Lindsay Pentelow, V&A

3D designer: Caroline Lowe, V&A

Architectural models: Supplied by CDC Design



