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Archive Research

Former Kentish Town Tube Station (141 - 145 Kentish
Town Road, London, NW1 8PB)

May 2024





Figure 1 (front cover): South Kentish Town in 1907, soon after opening [© London Transport Museum 2000/23011]

South Kentish Town Station opened in June, 1907 on the original section of the Charing Cross, Euston and Hampstead Railway (CCE&HR), also known as the Hampstead Tube. Tunnelling had begun in September, 1903 and when it opened served 16 stations and ran for 7.67 miles. Just a few weeks before opening, the planned name of the station – Castle Road (it was located close to the corner of that street), was abandoned and it became South Kentish Town instead. Tiles and signs already *in situ* had to be painted over (Figure 2).



Figure 2: In the abandoned tunnel platform, the name Castle Road is still visible on the walls [© J E Connor on <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/south-kentish-town-station>]

This was one of three entirely new underground lines to open in London during the first decade of the 20th century – the Baker Street and Waterloo Railway (BS&WR), the CCE&HR, and the Great Northern, Piccadilly and Brompton Railway (GNP&BR) – showing the ambition of the American financier and transport entrepreneur, Charles Tyson Yerkes¹, Chairman of the Underground Electric Railways Company of London Limited (UERL), who acquired and developed them all in the first years of the 20th

¹ Yerkes died in 1905 before the tube lines were completed.



century.² Yerkes appointed Leslie Green³ (1875-1908) to be the architect to the UERL in 1903 'for the station buildings above ground level and decorative work to Stations, Tunnels, Platforms and Passages'.⁴ He was commissioned to design 50 (sometimes said 40) new stations⁵ for UERL in a distinctive Edwardian house style, with elements of Art Nouveau in some of the decoration.

The former South Kentish Town Station is a classic Leslie Green ox-blood red⁶ terracotta arcaded box, with the station name originally picked-out in a distinctive black-on-white tiled frieze, similar elsewhere (Figure 1).⁷ It is typical in the fact it was two-storeys high, with wide semi-circular windows on the upper floor with lift machinery on that floor, and with a flat roof to enable commercial development above. Superstructures for offices, flats and hotels could be added later and a steel frame probably by the Fulham Steelworks Ltd. was provided for that purpose.⁸ A small number of stations, such as Regents Park, had no surface buildings. Leslie Green⁹ developed a distinctive style, which he adapted to fit different shaped sites, and the

² Information from Historic England's listing descriptions of Leslie Green stations.

³ Leslie Green (1875-1908), was born into a wealthy family in Maida Vale and after studying at Kensington School of Art, and spending a year in Paris, he was articled to his architect father before setting up on his own in 1897. He became ARIBA in 1898 and FRIBA in 1900. In 1903 he became a member of the Architectural Association. He was influenced by both Art Nouveau in Paris and Beaux Arts style and the pressure of his role in creating 40 new stations in less than five years, combined with bad asthma led to his early death at thirty-three in 1908. His assistant Stanley Heaps continued in the same style, opening stations at Maida Vale and Kilburn Park, seven years after Green's death.

⁴ David Leboff, *The Underground Stations of Leslie Green*, (2002), pp. 5-7; A. Stuart Gray, *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary*, (1985), p.198.

⁵ See Appendix One for a map showing all of Green's stations and a map showing the position of South Kentish Town in 1922. Appendix Two for an architectural plan and drawing for South Kentish Town Station in the archives of the London Transport Museum.

⁶ The colour was at the time flatteringly called 'ruby-red' see A. Stuart Gray, *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary*, (1985), p.78.

⁷ Kentish Town Station Heritage Audit 9 Feb 2017, in *London Underground Station Heritage Register 2020* by Jonathan Clarke, ed. Edmund Bell.

⁸ David Leboff, *The Underground Stations of Leslie Green*, (2002), p.8.

⁹ Green's first station was Oxford Circus, completed in 1906. It was here that his signature style, characterized by a combination of Beaux-Arts principles and the use of distinctive oxblood-red glazed terracotta tiles, began to take shape. Every other station was a different version.



style remains familiar to commuters and visitors to north and south-west London especially (Figures 3-6).



Figures 3-6: Typical Leslie Green stations at Hampstead, Belsize Park (Grade II), Lambeth North and Mornington Crescent

The original station building at South Kentish Town designed by Leslie Green is included on Camden's List of Locally Listed Buildings and is there described as 'A handsome architectural structure in its Ox-blood faience cladding. Its former double volume entrance hall has two large arches and smaller side windows on its front elevation, typical of so many London Underground Stations, together with a prominent dentilled projecting cornice above. The original elevations appear to be substantially intact. The top cornice and faience cladding of its original elevation turns the corner and continues on the side flanking elevation over the adjacent alleyway. The ground floor is now occupied by a shop which has fixed roller shutters and a plastic shop sign to its two front bays.'¹⁰ A structural steel frame is clad with masonry, onto which the ox-blood red

¹⁰ LB Camden, Locally Listed Buildings List, (2015) p. 22, Ref 700.



faience tiles are applied. This station lacks decorative elements (such as cartouches), except for pilaster capitals and ornamentation around the window openings. Although the front is typical in terms of Green's station design, the return elevation is more unusual, in that much of it is lacking the standard faience cladding, and is built in simple red brick (Figures 1 & 7).



Figure 7: Brick return with Faience just to front and corner [© SKARCHITECTS]

Surface station buildings were constructed around a load-bearing structural steel frame, which allowed them to be erected both quickly and cheaply, even though it was a new and modern building practice. The frames were clad in brick and then faced in ox-blood red faience glazed tiles produced by the Leeds Fireclay Co. Ltd. The elevations varied in their detailed treatment, but typically comprised a series of large arcaded bays, frequently incorporating shop units, with large Diocletian or arched windows to the upper storey, surmounted by a prominent modillion cornice (Figures 3-6). Each station had a spacious ticket hall tiled in rich green on bottom part of the wall, with an Art Nouveau style frieze with a stylised acanthus leaf or pomegranates, and with cream tiles



at the upper level and ticket windows in aedicular surround as shown at nearby Kentish Town (Figure 8). Other stations such as Russel Square were very similar and it is likely this was the same at South Kentish Town, but the ticket hall does not survive today. From the hall, lifts and a spiral stair went down to corridors, and further stairs down to the platforms, which were usually parallel. At South Kentish Town there were two lifts within a single 23' diameter shaft down to the platforms 50 feet below, and an emergency spiral staircase in an 18' diameter shaft. Some architectural plans of South Kentish Town (known during construction as Castle Road) survive in the London Transport Museum collection (see Figures 9 & 14, and Appendix Two).



Figure 8: The green-tiled ticket hall at Kentish Town in 1927 [© London Transport Museum 9861134]

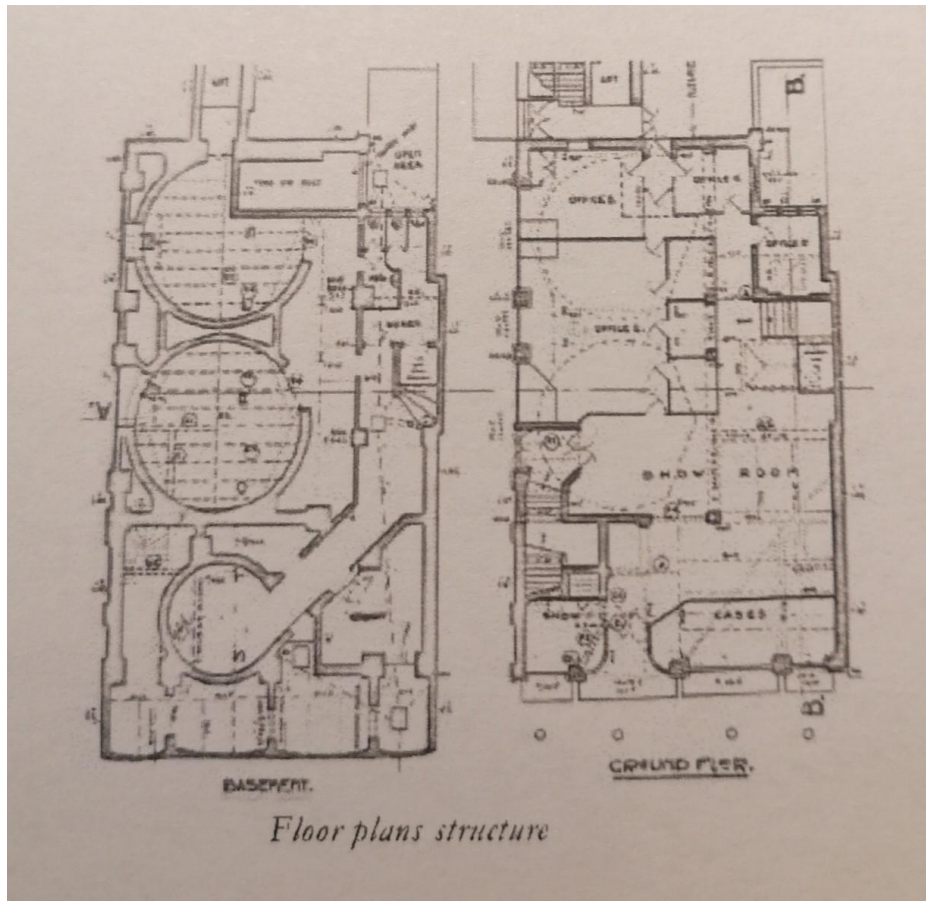


Figure 9: Basement and Ground Floor construction drawings of South Kentish Town (then known as Castle Road) revised drainage plan 1906. [© original London Transport Museum 1998/90350 reproduced in Pre-Application Planning, Design and Access Statement (Feb 2018) Cooley Architects] At South Kentish Town there remain tiled station names where the platforms once were, and as late as the 1960s much of the internal tiling survived (Figures 2 & 10).



Figure 10: The different sorts of tiling and green faience that survived at South Kentish Town Station in the late 1960s [© J E Connor on <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/south-kentish-town-station>]

Each of Green's stations were provided with two or four lifts and an emergency spiral staircase in a separate shaft. The lifts came from the Otis Elevator Company. South Kentish Town never had escalators as it closed before their general introduction in the early 1930s.¹¹ A later photograph c.1920 of South Kentish Town Station shows that a canopy had been erected over the entrance (Figure 12). At nearby Kentish Town, a canopy was erected over the entrance in 1911 - it projected 8ft from the face of the building, and was 18ft 6in long (Figure 8). The iron and glass roof cantilevered over the pavement and was carried by iron beams. At many stations the canopies survived well into the post-war era.

¹¹ David Leboff, *The Underground Stations of Leslie Green*, (2002), p.46; At nearby Kentish Town they were installed in 1932.



There were never many passengers at South Kentish Town, reputedly sometimes just three a day. Numbers were so low that drivers were known to not bother stopping there, even as early as 1908. Local newspapers reported two suicides at the station in 1920, maybe because so few people waited for trains there.¹² In 1924, the station was temporarily closed because of a power outage at Chelsea's Lots Road Power Station. Once power was restored it was decided not to re-open Mornington Crescent (another under-used station) and South Kentish Town. Mornington Crescent was eventually re-opened, but South Kentish Town remained closed due to the very low passenger use, despite appeals to reopen it and to make the service more regular.¹³ It seems that not all trains stopped there. Soon after the closure of the station, the ground floor freehold was sold to a third party in 1925, but the subsoil, air rights, and rear access to the vent shaft located to the rear of the former station were retained and remain the property of Transport for London (TfL), who also own the freehold to the emergency access route passage located adjacent to the site.¹⁴

South Kentish Town became a deep level air raid shelter during World War Two and it was equipped with bunks and used as a first aid post in 1940, but these facilities were removed immediately after the war. It is unknown when the platforms were demolished. Today the station is now retained for emergency egress from the Northern Line, and as an access point for permanent way works.¹⁵

In 1951 the poet Sir John Betjeman, wrote about his memories of the station. He said: "I remember it quite well... its entrance was on the Kentish Town Road, a busy street full of shops. Omnibuses and tramcars passed the entrance every minute, but they never stopped. True, there was a notice saying 'STOP HERE IF REQUIRED' outside the station. But no one required, so nothing stopped."¹⁶ He also wrote a prose piece called

¹² St. Pancras Gazette, 21 May 1920 & 17 September 1920.

¹³ St. Pancras Gazette, Friday 11 July 1924.

¹⁴ Letter from TfL to Monika Majcher of SKARCHITECTS 23 July 2023.

¹⁵ <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/south-kentish-town-station/>

¹⁶ <https://blackcablondon.net/tag/sir-john-betjeman/>



South Kentish Town, that told the fictional story of a passenger, Basil Green who became trapped in the disused station. It was based on a true incident where a train stopped at the station by mistake and opened its doors, but in real life no one was trapped.¹⁷

Over the past 70 years, the site has been subject to a variety of planning applications (see Appendix Three). The first was made in 1959 for change of use of the ground floor to offices. Subsequent applications from 1978 onwards, primarily concern the vertical extension and re-purposing of the main station building to provide residential accommodation.

In more recent times there have been requests to re-open the station (especially during the current, 2023-4, closure of Kentish Town Station for refurbishment) but these have come to nothing. The ground floor of the station building has been let to many shops over the years and the last, Cash Converters¹⁸ left some time ago (Figure 13).¹⁹ There has recently been a Pilates studio on the first floor, and since 2016 the former station is now the home of the Mission Breakout escape room, which means that while it is still regarded as an abandoned station, members of the public access the underground parts of the building. Visitors can now explore the disused station and solve clues to escape from the basement. The unique location and history of the station add an extra layer of intrigue to the venue and provide an immersive escape room experience.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Cash Converters had use of the upper floor lift building.

¹⁹ <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/south-kentish-town-station/>



Figures 11 & 12: Elevation of an identical canopy at Kentish Town Station in 1911 [© LMA GLC/AR/BR/22/BA/032377] and South Kentish Town Station in 1920 [© MissionBreakout]



Since 2013, at least two planning applications have been made to build flats above the former station and to the rear. In 2014, permission was granted for the erection of a mansard roof extension to provide 3 residential units (1x1bed and 2x2bed), and erection of associated bin and bike storage in Castle Place at the ground floor level.²⁰ The approval was subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement, which was completed that year. The design was not implemented and the permission has since expired. In

²⁰ Camden Planning online 2013/6368/P.



November 2017, *Camden New Journal* reported on the possibility of building flats above, which pressure group Kentish Town Road Action objected to. A recent (1922) application has been withdrawn.²¹



Figure 13: The station in more recent times when occupied by Cash Converters

²¹ Camden Planning online 2022/0034/P.



The use of steel and building above Leslie Green's stations

It was in the stations designed by Leslie Green for the Underground Electric Railways Company of London Ltd (UERL), comprising what are now the Bakerloo, Piccadilly, and Northern Lines that steel was put to more ambitious and systematic use than in any of London's earlier stations.²² As Jonathon Clarke has explained

'Each station was adapted to its site, so no two were the same, but the employment of standardised techniques of steel framing permitted virtual mass production. Clad with the memorable ox-blood coloured faience tiles, these blocky frameworks enabled the most skeletal of arcaded façades with the widest possible entrances and exits and the most uninterrupted of interior spaces, to speed the flow of passengers.'

²³ South Kentish Town Station was built with a steel frame and a surviving plan shows the roof structure and framing plan (Figure 14).

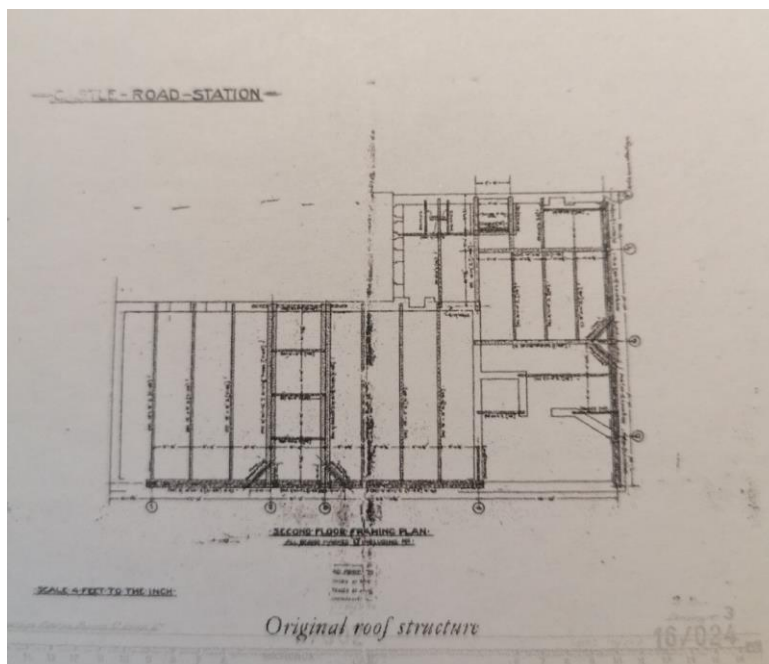


Figure 14: Roof structure drawing of South Kentish Town (then known as Castle Road) in 1906. [© original London Transport Museum 1998/90350 reproduced in Pre-Application Planning, Design and Access Statement (Feb 2018) Cooley Architects]

²² Jonathan Clarke, *Early Structural Steel in London Buildings A discreet revolution*, (2014), p. 279.

²³ *ibid*



Green's stations were only one or two-storeys high because functionally they did not need to be any taller than that. The ground floor was for tickets and access, and the mezzanine or first floor for lift machinery and offices. None were built higher during the initial building of the stations. However, being steel framed they were intended and designed to take speculative developments above them, which partly depending on location were, or were not, built up in future years.²⁴

All but two of Green's station buildings had two-storeys above ground level, both Great Central (renamed Marylebone) and Waterloo originally had just one. The flat roof design of all the stations was evidently an essential design specification, there to encourage development above the station.

The steel-frame structure was designed to support upper floors and allowed fire resistance, and the reinforced concrete to form the roofs and floors was also fire-proof.

The potentially lucrative opportunity for over-station buildings, did not immediately happen everywhere.

The two exceptions were Elephant & Castle (see below) and Camden Town where an extra floor was built immediately by 1907. The upper floors of Camden station was a billiards club and remained for many years (Figure 14).

²⁴ Information from Jon Clarke, Historic England.



Figure 14: Camden Town in 1907 [© London Transport Museum 2000/23006]

In 2017, a Centre for London report stated that ‘A few 1900s-era tube stations were also built with capacity for over-site development’.²⁵ This is incorrect, as all Leslie Green-designed stations with their steel-frames, had the potential to have superstructures erected on the flat roofs. Part of what makes Leslie Green’s stations unique is their structural system, designed from the start to accommodate additional storeys above the station building. It is however a subject on which little research work has been undertaken - why some sites were exploited and built up, while others were not. In looking at where it did occur it might be possible to see why and what the intent was. But it did not happen as frequently as was perhaps the hope of the architect Leslie Green and the Underground Electric Railways Company of London Ltd (UERL). A brief synopsis of each station where building occurred is made below (page 15).

There was already a nascent tradition of building above the underground, and over the older overground railway termini in London that Green must have been aware of.. The

²⁵ Nicolas Bosetti & Kat Hanna, *Ideas Above Your Station: Exploring The Potential For Development at London’s Stations*, (2017).



few examples of mid-19th century over-site developments were funded by railway companies, who developed hotels within their central London termini as they laid down tracks. However, these developments are small relative to the stations' footprints. This has been suggested that the efficient use of land was not a strong guiding principle.²⁶ Examples included Victoria (1860), Cannon Street (1867), Charing Cross (1865) and St Pancras (1867) and these hotels were mainly constructed for the convenience of passengers and as architectural status symbols or features of the competing railway companies.

More contemporary examples of building above underground stations that Leslie Green may have looked to were the stations of the Central London Railway (CLR), including Oxford Circus. At least twelve original CLR stations were given a surface building designed by the architect Harry Bell Measures, a single-storey structure designed with a flat roof which could be capable of carrying additional floors as and when demand arose.²⁷ Soon after Oxford Circus opened in 1900, an additional four storeys had indeed been added to form Oxford Circus House, to the designs by Delissa Joseph (Figure 15).²⁸ This was the first example on that line of building above the station. Joseph designed other offices above Measures' stations including at Tottenham Court Road, Lancaster Gate and Queensway.²⁹ He went on to design superstructures above some of the underground stations of Leslie Green (see below).

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ Historic England, Listing Description of Oxford Street Underground Station.

²⁸ These later came to accommodate the CLR's head offices.

²⁹ Jonathan Clarke, *Early Structural Steel in London Buildings A discreet revolution*, (2014), p. 279.



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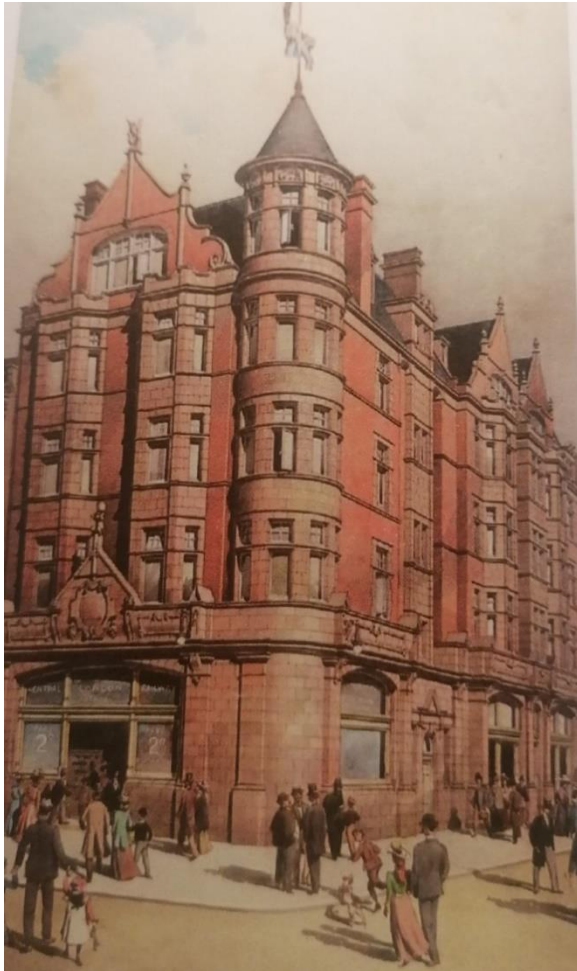


Figure 15: Oxford Circus office building by Delissa Joseph c. 1900



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Stations designed by Leslie Green with superstructures

Goodge Street (called Tottenham Court Road until 1908)



1907 [© London Transport Museum 2000/22704]



1909 proposal for block of flats over Goodge Street by George Leslie [© London Transport Museum
1997/1742] Flats as built post 1918 (there in image of 1925) shown in 2000s [© Buildington]



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Leicester Square



The original station in 1906/7.

By 1916 a heavy stone-faced office block has been built above the station (see J. Clarke, p. 2810)



A picture from 1925 shows the offices [© London Transport Museum 1998/87650]



At Knightsbridge, Hyde Park Corner and Piccadilly Circus, the architect Delissa Joseph, F.R.I.B.A. (1859 - 1927) designed the superstructures. In an obituary it was said he designed 'superstructures of railway stations'.³⁰

The offices or hotels above all three stations, according to one source are themselves steel framed. See footnote 144 in Jonathan Clarke, *Early Structural Steel in London Buildings A discreet revolution*, (2014), The buildings above Knightsbridge Station were constructed by the Waring White Building Co. Ltd. a firm particularly active in steel-framed buildings.

All three stations originally had hotels above them. Given Delissa Josephs established reputation for building above stations elsewhere, and that all the structures were hotels it might be that they were commissioned as a group. This is not known for sure.



Piccadilly Circus Station with the Haymarket Hotel above in 1932 [© London Transport Museum 1999/7100]

³⁰ *East London Observer*, 15 Jan 1927. Delissa Joseph (1859-1927) was an Anglo-Jewish architect, best known as a designer of synagogues including those at Hampstead (Grade II*) and Hackney in London and Didsbury in Manchester (Grade II). He also designed housing in London, including 9 Embankment Gardens in Chelsea and Fitzgeorge Avenue in Hammersmith as well as offices, flats and schools.



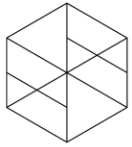
(above) Piccadilly Circus Station with the Haymarket Hotel above in 1932
[© London Transport Museum 1999/7100]. This later became the Pizza on the Park (now closed) see
below



(above right) Hyde Park Corner Underground Station an exterior view showing the Park View Hotel facade
situated above the station entrance in 1925 [© London Transport Museum 1998/59589]



Knightsbridge Station in 1906-7 [© London Transport Museum 1998/87425] and with the Basil Hotel
(designed by D, Joseph) in 1925



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Elephant & Castle

At Elephant & Castle Station, South London House (with three floors of offices) was built over the station in 1907, just a year after it first opened. It is accessed between the entrance to the station and two shops. The office block above the station was used for many years by the South London Press.



Elephant & Castle Station c.1908 and in recent times



Covent Garden

Leslie Green's two-storey station was only extended upwards in the 1960s. In 1967, three commercial storeys were completed above, with renovation works in 1986. It was extended by Gort Scott in 2017, when an extra storey was added and the ticket hall was remodelled. Gort Scott stated in AJ that 'Although the station structure was designed to take the load of additional floors, the 1960s extension in loadbearing brick takes up significant capacity. The materials of the new extension have therefore been carefully selected'.³¹



Picture showing Leslie Green structure, the three storeys of 1960s building, plus the additional floor added by Gort Scott c. 2017.

³¹ Gort Scott quoted in [Gort Scott's extension of listed Covent Garden tube station approved \(architectsjournal.co.uk\)](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk)



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Oxford Circus



Watercolour painted by Frank Green, and signed by the station architect Leslie Green, showing the original station in 1906 [© London Transport Museum 1994/557]



The Bakerloo station at Oxford Circus with upper stories. The upper stories are not listed.

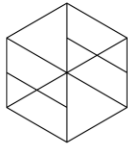


Summary to report

As shown above there are some examples of the stations of Leslie Green with super-structures built in the Edwardian era, but they are the exception, rather than the rule. The reputation of Delissa Joseph and his work elsewhere on the above ground buildings of the Central London Railway, probably accounted for him being commissioned to create hotels at Piccadilly Circus, Hyde Park Corner and Knightsbridge stations. Elsewhere, where offices or flats were built, they were in busy commercial or fashionable locations or densely populated suburbs – Elephant & Castle, Leicester Square, Holborn (not detailed above) and Goodge Street. The Camden one-storey extension for a billiard hall is probably a one-off. The superstructure at Green's Oxford Circus Station was not built until some years later. But there was already a building by Delissa Joseph above the Central Line station there by 1900, and it might well have been influential in the design process of Green, as he saw the potential of steel framing to give his new stations the opportunity to expand upwards in the future. Covent Garden was not built on until the 1960s.

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Revised 1.5.2014



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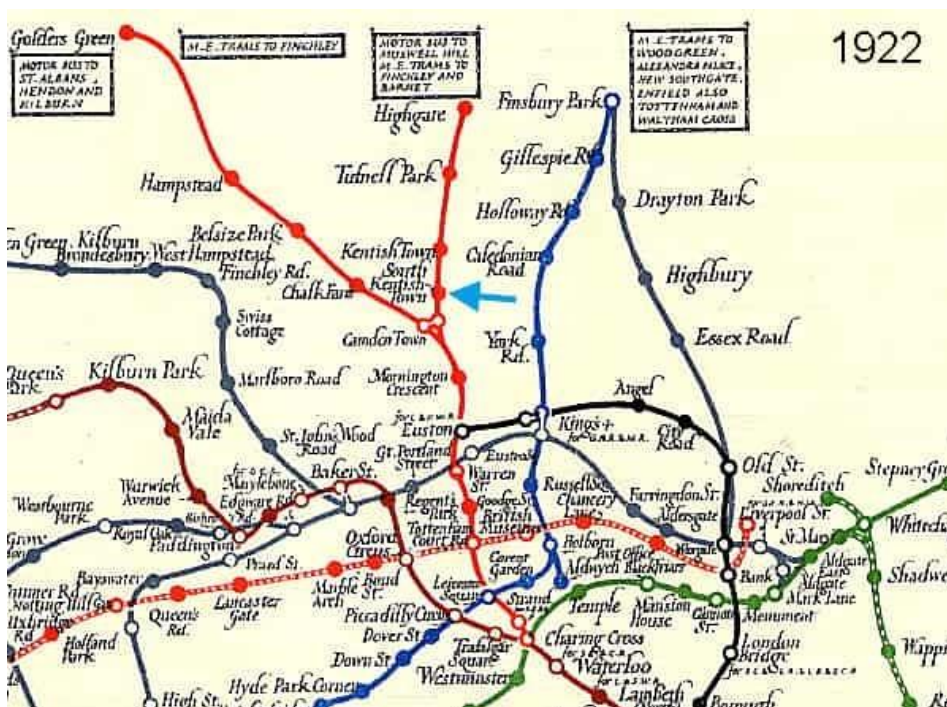
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Appendix One

Map of Leslie Green Underground Stations [© Londonist Ltd.]





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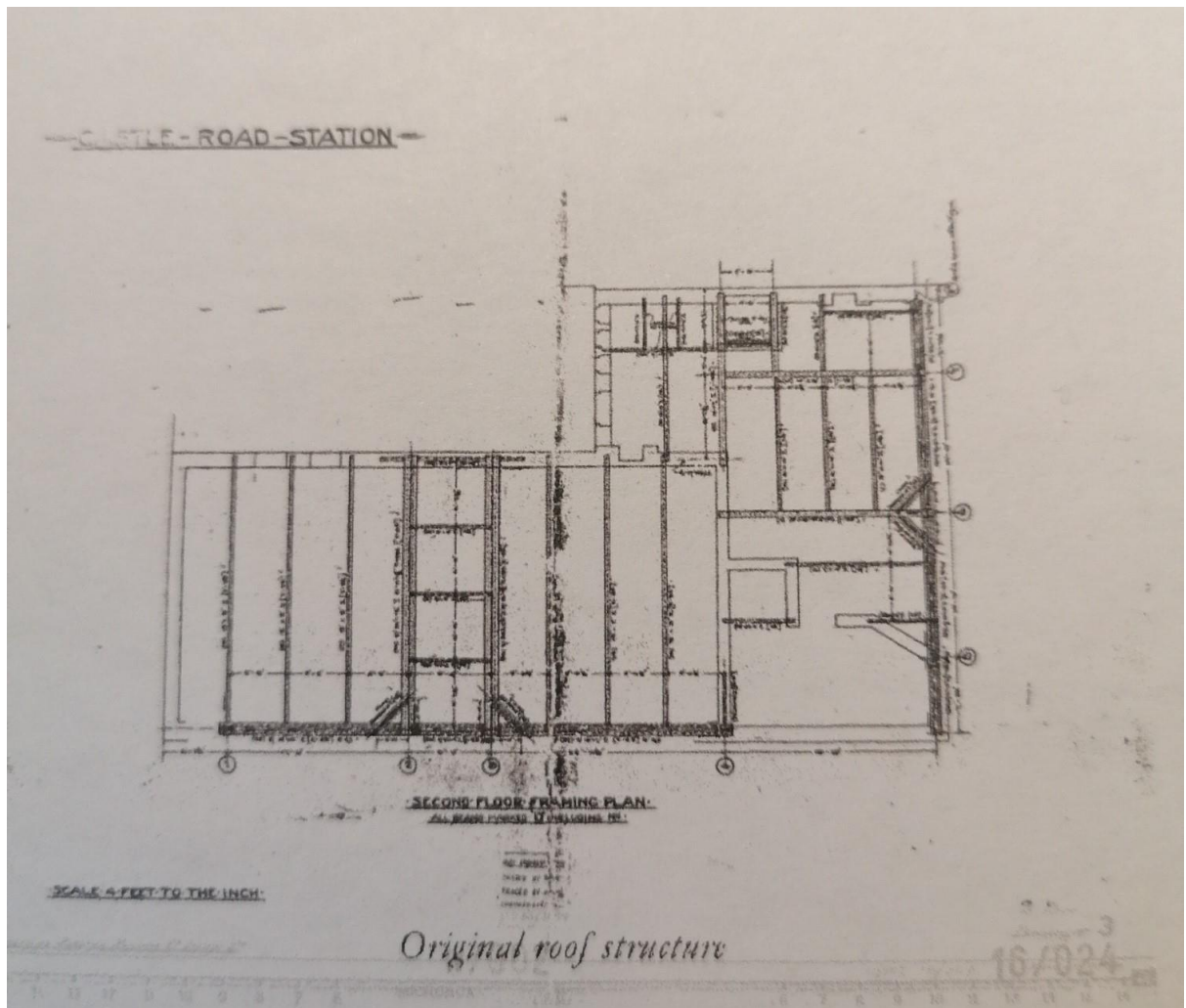
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Appendix Two

Surviving drawings of South Kentish Town Station in store in Acton at the London Transport Museum (not seen but used as reproduced in Pre-Application Planning, Design and Access Statement (Feb 2018) Cooley Architects

Architectural drawing; Northern line - Castle Road (South Kentish Town) Station: revised drainage plan 1906. 1998/90350





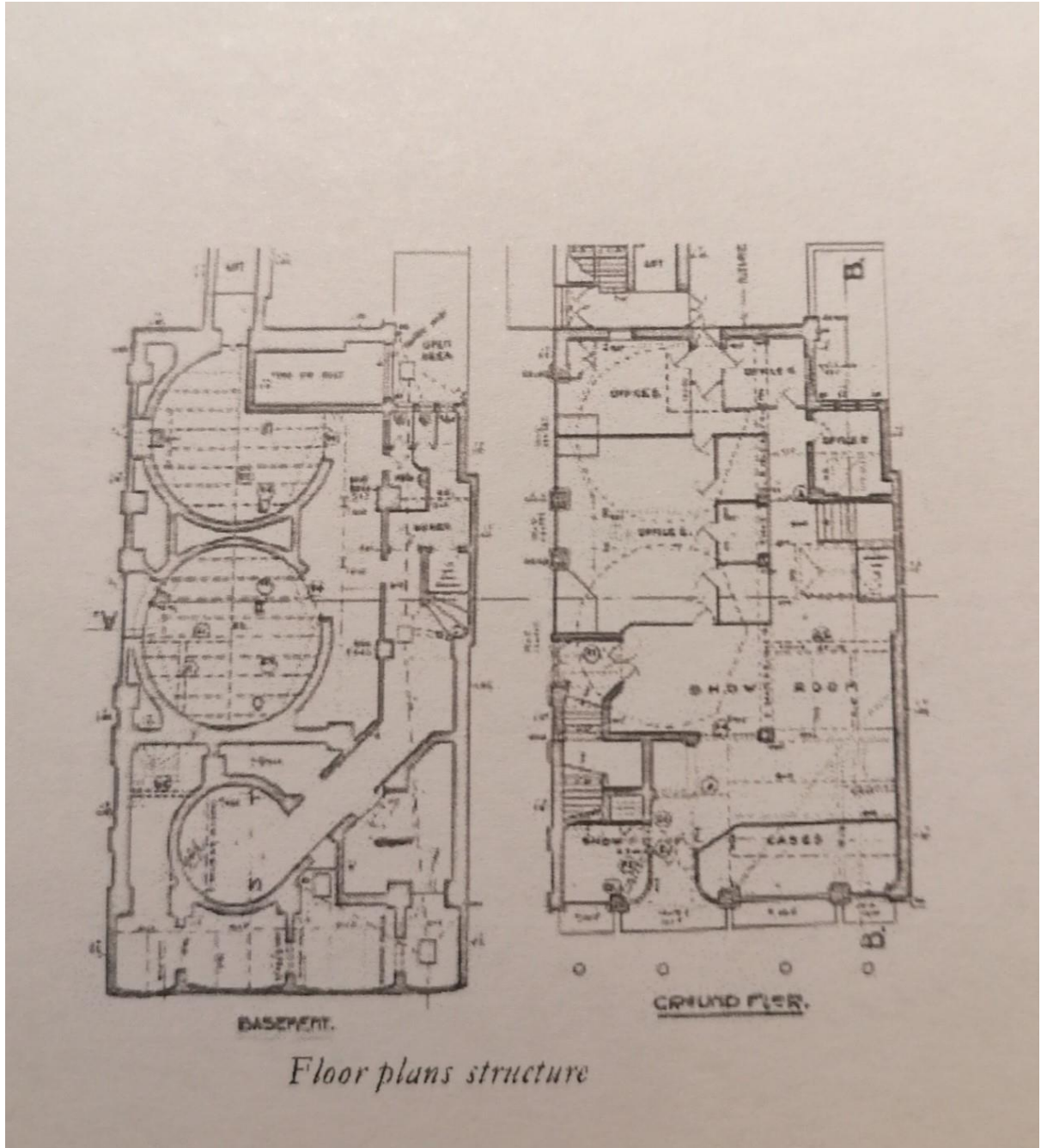
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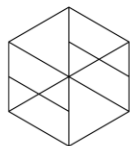
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Appendix Three

Relevant planning history 141-145 Kentish Town Road

017/4155/P - Registered 03/08/2017; Erection of roof extension to provide 3 self-contained flats (C3) and erection of associated ground level bin and bike storage in Castle Place. Withdrawn

2015/6923/P - Planning permission was granted on the 05/04/2016 for the 'Change of use of basement floor from Sauna/Massage (Class Sui Generis) to Leisure - Escape room (indoor entertainment activity) (Class Sui Generis)'

2014/3218/P - Planning permission was granted on the 14/11/2014 for the 'Change of use from Sauna/Massage (Sui Generis) to place of worship (Class D1)(lower ground floor level)'

2013/2289/P - Planning permission was granted on the 13/06/2013 for the 'Change of use on first floor from office (Class B1) to a pilates studio (Class D2)'

2013/6368/P - Planning permission was Granted Subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement on the 15/04/2014 for the 'Erection of a mansard roof extension to provide 3 residential units (1x1bed and 2x2bed) (Class C3), and erection of associated bin and bike storage in Castle Place at ground floor level'

2011/5021/P - Planning permission was Granted Subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement on the 30/03/2012 for the 'Erection of roof extension with terraces and change of use of first floor from offices (Class B1) to residential (Class C3), together to provide 4 x 2-bedroom flats and 2 x 1-bedroom flats'

PEX0300256 - Planning permission granted on the 15/08/2003 for the 'Mansard roof extension to existing building to create 180sqm of additional office (B1) floorspace above 3 existing retail on ground floor (A1) and office on first floor (B1), and the erection of 2 storey rear extension to create office (B1) floorspace including provision for cycle parking'

G11/32/A/36830 - Planning permission was granted on the 04/11/1983 for the 'Use of the basement for a keep-fit and body studio.'

CTP/G11/32/A/31990 - Planning permission was granted on the 12/04/1983 for the 'erection of a second storey roof extension to the main building for use as offices'



CTP/G11/32/A/27374 - Planning permission was granted on the 21/11/1978 for the
'Change of use of the basement from storage to recording/rehearsal studios'

CTP/G11/32/A/27089 - Planning permission was granted on the 06/10/1978 for the
'Refurbishment for use as offices on the first floor and light industry on the ground floor'

CTP/G11/32/A/26019 - Planning permission was granted on the 27/06/1978 for the
'refurbishment of the existing structure and the erection of a new 2-storey building at
the rear, and the use of the whole of the top floor for offices and the whole of the
ground floor for light industrial purposes'

CTP/G11/32/A/22786 - Planning permission was granted on a limited period on the
19/08/1976 for the 'retention for a further limited period of a single storey structure for
light industrial use.'

TP/46641/NW/6019 - Planning permission was granted on the 06/07/1959 for the 'use
of part of the ground floor for shop and office and remainder for printing'