

STATION

A journey through 20th and 21st
century railway architecture and design

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BATSFORD



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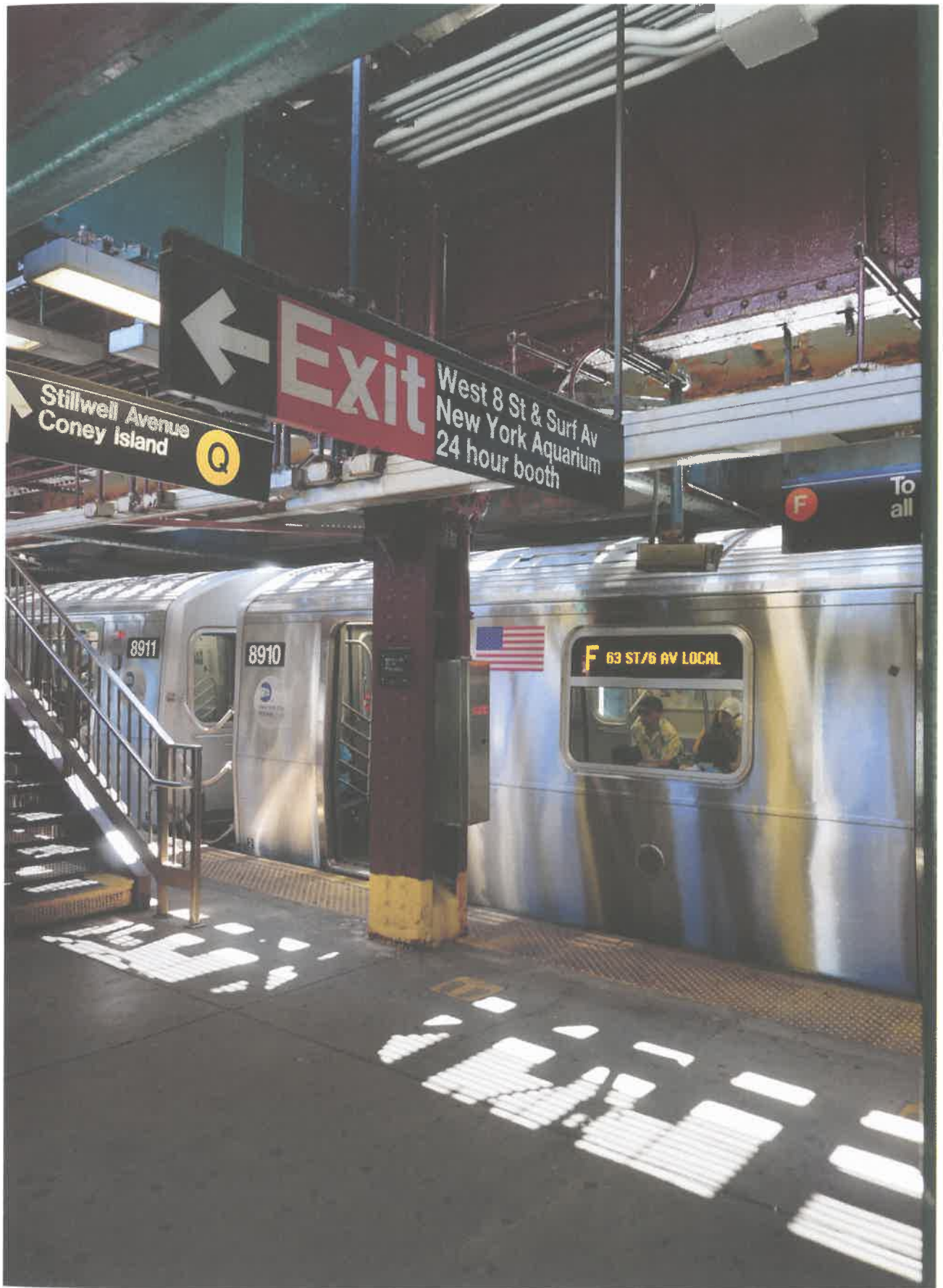
Introduction

Imagine a world where every step was a trial, where mud and forest and things that eat you got between you and your destination, where horses cantered between inns and everyone smelled. The recent reality of our world was a place where - essentially - you didn't travel unless you had a good reason. Men off to make money or make love or make war took these bizarre Barry Lyndon journeys involving so much side plot. The only real way you could travel anywhere was on a boat - the land was unconquered.

I met my great-grandmother, a child of the 1800s, incredibly born when Queen Victoria was on the throne in the United Kingdom. Her mother knew this world, right on the point that Yorkshire industrialized and the world exploded, sending ripples down the decades. In the 1830s the world changed completely as the railway and the steam engine came to prominence in a flash of exuberance where pure chance and scientific skill somehow mixed in the white-hot embers of the fires of human imagination, pioneered in England's North at the Stockton and Darlington Railway, Middleton Railway in Leeds and the Liverpool to Manchester Railway.

When you live in a country whose past seems to offer more than its future, you learn these lessons in school, on TV every night, at preserved heritage railways on the weekend: the technology that shaped the world, Stephenson and Watt et al, were the mad Musks of their day, the nutty professors whose experiments bizarrely worked - even though there were many explosions, crashes and deaths to come.

And for my great-grandmother's mother, life would never be the same again: a fiery furnace of social changes; enclosure forcing the peasants from their common grazing land into Bradford's wool factories; the potato famine starving the Irish into the English mills; jobs and routines and clocks set by railway companies rather than the sun and the seasons; back-breaking graft, filth and horror and injury and mistreatment and repetition; but also the chance to make something in the mire - a distant relative (perhaps) mopped up all the building contracts in Bradford to construct the banks and the mills and villas. William Beanland lies immortalized in Undercliffe Cemetery, a member of the merchant class Marx and Engels were studying in Manchester as they watched the wretched poor slip further into



drink and prostitution and saw a revolution as the only corollary.

The industrial world needed to move people - the commuters on the trains. The railways brought people to work their dead-end jobs as it does today. The paper pushing is now key pushing, we convince ourselves the pointlessness has a worth - or we just accept it doesn't and take the money anyway.

But the railway also began to take the people away for pleasure: soon you could visit Scarborough and Whitby and Southport and even London. If time had changed so had distance: the possibilities stretched and required a new mental outlook. How could you live through an age like this? We baulk at the way technology super-speeds the changes today; one wonders if this rapid social change itself is one reason for the anxieties and the attention-deficit disorders you see in everyone if you look hard enough. Imagine how much therapy the Victorians would have needed - and how ill-equipped the workhouses and the asylums were to look after a people who were so shocked, who had gone from such a small life to such a restless one. The trains partly did this, a steam-powered jolt to the system.

For the next 100 years the railways dominated everything like a Bruce Forsyth on metal rails, refusing to go quietly or not be there every day: they were the ways you got around, they were for the military and the vacationers, for transporting people and for transporting the new goods and the coal and the wood needed to power everything. The railways bought everything up and opened more: hotels, factories, shops. The system reshaped the very land that sheep had grazed on for centuries: viaducts crossed valleys and in urban areas everything was pushed aside - the graves at St Pancras Old Churchyard were shifted by a young Thomas Hardy so the Midland Railway could plough through. Rails injected themselves everywhere like parasites. Thousands died building the follies - the graveyards on the moors above the Woodhead Tunnel in the Pennines mark the last resting place of the mainly

Irish navvies whose death rates were higher than soldiers at the Battle of Waterloo. As well as the bulk cargos the trains were eventually given royal approval and ferried the elites around - Wolferton Station is preserved as a quaint reminder of when kings and queens would catch the royal train from London to Sandringham for every Christmas holiday.

Wars needed railways - indeed, many railways like those in Paris and Berlin's loop lines were constructed especially to allow military trains access to the lines out to various parts of the country. The First and Second World Wars were dominated by the vast bulk transports of fuels and ammunition on the rails, people too - lest we forget the horrors, increasing in scale from the troop trains carrying scared young boys to the fronts, to the refugee trains ferrying the displaced, to the outright catastrophe of the Nazi cattle trucks loaded with humans bound for the gas chambers. Trains had proved their worth - even if the intention often disgusted. And what did they get in return? The post-war age was to be the motor age, and then the age of flight.

For half of the 20th century hardly anyone was celebrating trains and stations; we were lost in a drunken fug of exhaust smoke and screeching tyres and motorway plans - the USA and Asia and Eastern Europe still are. Around the world railways were subjugated by the car: Birmingham New Street is essentially demolished to make way for a car park on top of it; Prague Hlavní Nádraží gets a motorway running right outside the front door and narrowly escapes the wrecking ball; Penn Station bulldozed and put underground; the Euston Arch taken down and thrown into the Lea. Grand Central was even nearly axed in the mid-1970s, if you can believe that. Jackie Kennedy's campaigning saved the station that we all recognize today as one of America's most beautiful.

East Dereham's bypass on the A47 road in Norfolk was laid on the course of a former railway, and

the Cambridgeshire guided busway was laid on a former railway. LA had all its streetcar lines bought up and ripped up in one of the biggest municipal swindles in human history, which inspired the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. The perpetrators? The oil, automobile and tyre corporations. The argument was often that the railway companies of the 19th century were too powerful – dominating everything. Now it was the turn of the auto industry. This was sold as personal emancipation – the idea that you were in control of your own vehicle and your own life, and timetables were no longer your boss.

The suburbanization of the United States was made possible by cars and the federal highway programmes that gave them roads to drive on; enabling white flight and building freeways like the Cross Bronx Expressway right through black neighbourhoods to boot. City planner Robert Moses got everything he wanted – almost. His Lower Manhattan Expressway was stopped by Jane Jacobs and the locals of Soho, Little Italy and Chinatown, as you can discover in my book *Unbuilt* (apologies for the product placement).

The USA went from around 40,000 stations at the peak of its railroad age to little more than 500 Amtrak halts, and every year the service suffers, despite the recently improved Acela trains on the East Coast. Argentina's rail map of the 19th century was impressively tentacular. As the 20th century went on, the majority of lines were removed. Ireland removed a vast swathe of lines and Australia did too.

As Zdeněk Tomeš points out, this decline – centred as it was more markedly than anywhere else in the Rust Belt of the USA – was also a problem of freight. Railways (and airlines) often joke that passengers are simply 'living cargo'. The real dosh is in freight. And deindustrialization in Detroit and Baltimore and Buffalo was a hammer blow. The railways made money transporting heavy bulky stuff like wood and steel and coal. Lorries and vans could be more nimble and were more suited to the retail and service economy to come.

Abandoned lines are everywhere, poking out of the grass. At the start of the 21st century we suddenly decided that they would make ideal linear parks: the High Line in New York, Paris's Promenade Plantée, the Goods Line in Sydney, the Folkestone Harbour Branch, the tracks threading silently through Tempelhof Airport in Berlin's newest park. It's odd that a kind of memento mori of the railways and their decline has become a way of making them cool again. And ironic, of course, that the popularity bestowed on these previously ignored and misunderstood arteries is irrelevant – they can never reopen as real railways because they are now popular parks.

In Britain one word was synonymous with the hollowing out of the railways: Beeching. His axe fell on rural branch lines around the country, robbing towns and villages and suburbs of their railways and stations. Portishead lost a striking new station in 1964 that was barely ten years old. The reinstatement of that line and that station will surely happen in the next decade but whether the station will be cheap 'n' cheerful? Well, we are deep into an austerity age.

Writing on their blog, Historic England quotes Steven Parissien, author of *The English Railway Station*: 'Richard Beeching was an amateur in the railway world, economically out of his depth and politically awkward. Britain's railways were thus disembowelled by a man who should not have been let near a railway, let alone the Ministry of Transport.'

We tend to compare cars to trains but it's really buses that were seen as replacements too, or, as we often say in the Anglo world, 'coaches' to denote longer travel that involves motion sickness, Tardis toilets that are impossible to use if the driver is not maintaining a steady 5mph in a straight line, cramped conditions and cricked necks. Coaches also summon up memories of school trips, for teachers would be mad to let a load of kids go on a train with their constantly opening and closing doors. Whenever you see a group of kids in their now ubiquitous high-vis stepping on and off Tube

trains it's enough to give you a heart attack thinking about the chances of one getting left behind sans iPhone. The Netflix show *Sex Education* perfectly nailed the school coach trip to France, even down to its set design where everything on the hired coach was brown and orange - as any child of the 1980s will remember. A coach can be a sealed and managed experience, which is why teachers love it and restless passengers will hate it - no leg stretching save for at the services.

In some countries buses (or coaches) quickly usurped trains; in the United States where railways were dismantled en masse, and in Spain where they languished in an underfunded malaise for decades until the AVE revolution. In some nations people will actively encourage you to take a bus and say their trains suck: Latvia and Bosnia and Herzegovina come to mind as places where I've been warned off the rails and on to the roads. In recent times coach companies have upped their game with very cheap fares and interiors that are not quite as cosy as Grandma's house but still better than some ageing trains: Lux Express, RegioJet and FlixBus shook things up in Central Europe.

Conversely, in countries like Britain, the coach is really seen as being a total step down that exists solely for those on very tight budgets (isn't that everyone these days?) or travelling at weird times like on Christmas Day or to Stansted Airport at 3am. Bus stations have often reflected the fact that buses have been seen as a little seedy. Anyone who has issues with Deutsche Bahn's station infrastructure is probably someone who expects a little more from life and possibly has never had to endure the much worse barren wasteland of Berlin's Zentraler Omnibusbahnhof - an experience that, unsurprisingly, is documented in *We Children from Bahnhof Zoo*, where the Zoo train station is filled with pimps and prostitutes, while the bus station is even wilder, windier and if anything more scary. Prague's bus station is a car crash and many cities have the most rudimentary collection of shelters and

roofs purporting to be a bus station - unmanned, cold, lonely and as far from the glamour of travel as you can imagine. Some bus stations have found fame for their bizarre horror-film interiors, like the Port Authority Terminal in New York, final stopping point of waifs and strays and a big fixture in David Simon's *The Deuce*. Tel Aviv's compellingly crazy megastructure of ramps, malls, bomb shelters, soldiers and hobos asking for 20 shekels is one of the world's most bizarre bus stations. A very few bus stations have achieved legendary status - Building Design Partnership's restored Preston is probably the world's best; Derby's Art Deco masterwork was also something to behold. At least with a train you get a station - sometimes you have to wait for a Megabus on the street, leaning on a lamp post.

We oversimplify eras like we oversimplify people: the 70s was bell bottoms and Bowie; this person is a rogue and this one is an angel. We end up having shorthand. With places too: Berlin is Berghain, Monte Carlo is money, Birmingham is ... concrete? So although the period from 1950 to the end of the century was indeed dominated by road building and cars, it was not entirely the end of trains. There was some flowering of new, innovative solutions - especially in high-speed intercity lines and urban metros.

Grand railway schemes were still being dreamed up around the world: Japan's Shinkansen, France's TGV (*Train à Grande Vitesse*), Rio's Metro. New stations were coming onstream, there was a desire to modernize the creaking Victorian infrastructure in Europe, and for those that had never got their railways or city metro systems in the developing world they wanted it. Some countries like Austria and Switzerland and Russia and India never gave up on their trains.

But the railways would have to be better. Japan's bullet trains and then Germany's ICE (Inter City Express) became world leaders. New stations like those in Kyoto and Kassel were built for the new

high-speed lines. In Britain, the start of the rail revolution meant something special had to happen too - the APT (Advanced Passenger Train) story gets its own section later in this Introduction, as does the modernization of the West Coast Main Line, which gave Britain its first truly modern railway and beautiful stations like Coventry. And although the Euston Arch had been lost, the 1960s Euston Station looked clean and calm like an airport terminal before it got mucked about with in the later decades.

The new stations for the new towns at Harlow and Milton Keynes looked modern and were slightly quirky outliers in such car-led places. As train travel slowly began to increase again from the 1990s onwards, we needed to update so many stations, especially in London, and the likes of Nick Derbyshire and Alastair Lansley overhauled Liverpool Street. Derbyshire worked with Nicholas Grimshaw on Waterloo International. Farrells' London Bridge looked fantastic with its wood and lofty heights. Improvements to King's Cross and Paddington brought things up to standard. But it was St Pancras that became the showiest of all stations in the British capital - a real link between the present and the first railway golden age of York Station and Wemyss Bay in Scotland.

If the trains in rural areas suffered from a bad case of the axe in Britain, the USA and Argentina, then urban areas at least were spared - in some ways. Cars did kind of make sense in the countryside, even though rural towns that lost their stations would never do as well as those that retained them. And even if Americans have all but given up on trains, certainly British market towns are falling over themselves to get their station and their branch line back, with a new generation of lighter trains like the Parry People Mover or Vivarail's repurposed Tube Stock, which has had its problems but hopefully has a future, sometimes seen as the answer. More innovations will no doubt come as we see the Earth is on fire and realize that we need greener ways to get

around. The newly reopened stations in places like Kenilworth show the way to a new future.

But while all this was happening in the countryside the urban story was different. Heavy rail and freight rail declined, with some of the least-used stations being the ones with very limited services near industrial areas or in locations just outside of city centres like Ardwick or Bordesley. Old freight lines and terminals became things like the High Line.

The metro story is very different. These lines have thrived even through the car era, because even the most boneheaded politician or auto lobbyist recognized the need for mass transit in dense areas (except LA, ignored for years, and which is finally catching up). New York and London cannot commute to Wall Street and the City en masse in cars, so there needs to be massive-capacity public transport.

New York's Subway very obviously faced tough times though in the 20th century as the money ran out and the fear of crime increased. Vintage photos of *Warriors*-era Subway trains covered in graffiti are a stark contrast to today's clean, efficient system. A system which, of course, New Yorkers love to moan about and one that is very far from perfect and in need of a lot of TLC, but nevertheless can get you all over the city at any time of day and night, speedily and for just 30-odd bucks a week. Which, in the world's most expensive city, is about the only bargain you're going to get any more. Personally I could not be happier riding these rails in the dead of night, surrounded by the sleeping hobos and shift workers, seeing what the city is really like and experiencing the filth and the fury as J. G. Ballard and Jonathan Meades would encourage us to do, knowing I'd otherwise be dropping 100-odd bucks on an Uber from the Upper East Side to somewhere out in the middle of Bed-Stuy.

The removal of the elevated 'L' lines took away some of the drama of the stations, though you can still find those above the roofs of Brooklyn. And obviously Chicago has kept its 'L' stations too, which are quaint relics of how city transit was envisioned