

SAVE Britain's Heritage and the Jubilee Line Extension. Our Campaign for London's Recent Underground Architecture

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This lecture is the story of a campaign to protect a remarkable 1990s Underground Station from damaging alterations; it sets it in the context of the broader struggle to achieve protected status for key post-1945 landmark structures of all kinds.¹

Forty years ago, a new preservation society, the Thirties Society in London, was founded. At the launch party held on December 13, 1979 in the glorious Art Deco Ball Room of the Park Lane Hotel the keynote speech was made by a veteran Parliamentarian, Norman St John Stevas. He said with foresight: "Good buildings are at their most vulnerable when still young. As taste and technology move on, they are not old enough to be venerable and the acclamation they received when completed is forgotten." The formation of the Thirties Society was prompted by the lack of protection for buildings of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1992 its name was changed to the Twentieth Century Society in recognition of an expanded role to champion the architecture of the second half of the twentieth century.²

The most famous early case of the Thirties Society was the vicious destruction of the 1929 Firestone Factory over a Bank Holiday weekend in 1980. This brought a furious reaction from the Minister for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, who promptly listed the 1930 Hoover Factory and three buildings belonging to Trafalgar House, the company that owned the Firestone Factory. Scotland at this time had a more enlightened rule, a rolling programme by which any building or structure more than 30 years old could be listed, steadily extending protection of the past year by year. We achieved this unexpectedly suddenly in England when an enlightened junior Minister, William Waldegrave, introduced the 30-year-rule to England and went on to say that, in exceptional circumstances, an endangered building which was just ten years old could also be listed. Historic buildings in England are graded in three categories: I, II* and II. Grade I and II* structures are both deemed outstanding while Grade II are deemed of special interest. The one caveat in the new test was that, to receive protection, post-war buildings had to be of Grade II* quality, outstanding and not just special.

Tube Station Buildings of the Last Decade of the 20th Century

In 2015, I suddenly found myself fighting for Modernist buildings which I had written up as Architecture Correspondent of *The Times of London* when they were new in the early 1990s. First came Nicholas Grimshaw's high-tech The Ship in Plymouth, built for the *Western Morning News*. With Henrietta Billings of the Twentieth Century Society, SAVE Britain's Heritage issued legal warnings and succeeded in getting it listed. It found a

developer to transform it into a centre for small businesses, with gymnasium and workshops. Next came Southwark Underground Station by Richard MacCormac, the architect who is subject of this paper. Southwark is one of a remarkable collection of new

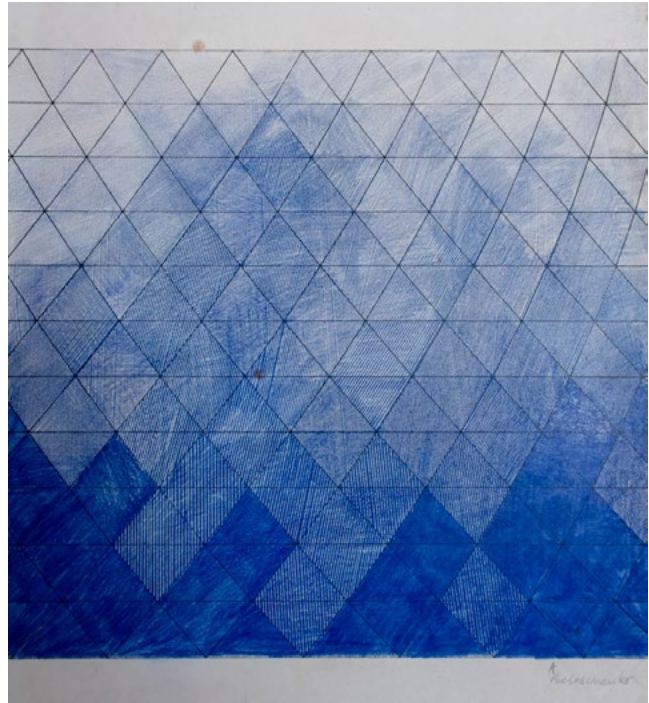
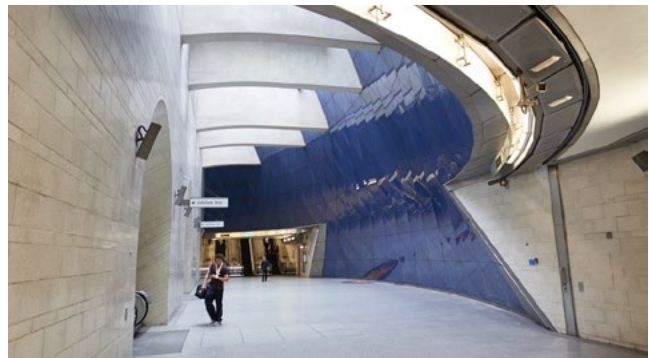


Fig. 1: Southwark underground station designed by MJP architects, 1999, the curved intermediate concourse of four storeys high topped with high level tapered concrete beams finished in polished concrete, with Alex Beleschenko's blue glass screen

Fig. 2: Design drawing for the triangular glass tiles, tinted blue and fritted to graduate their opacity, darker at the base to lighter near the roof

underground stations on the Jubilee Line Extension which runs from Westminster in central London, crossing beneath the river to Waterloo Station, continuing onto the Millennium Dome and terminating on the north bank at Stratford.

All the new 1990s underground stations on the Jubilee Line are of exceptional quality. This was thanks to a remarkable programme of architectural patronage due to one man, Roland Paoletti. He was born in London to Italian parents and trained as an architect in Manchester. He worked for Sir Basil Spence, architect of Coventry Cathedral, for some years, but found inspiration in Venice while studying under the leading masters of the early 1960s, Albini, De Carlo, Gardella, and Scarpa. Spence then asked him to do the working drawings of his new British Embassy in Rome. The architect engineer Pier Luigi Nervi had a watching brief and took Paoletti into his office. Possibly for Paoletti's

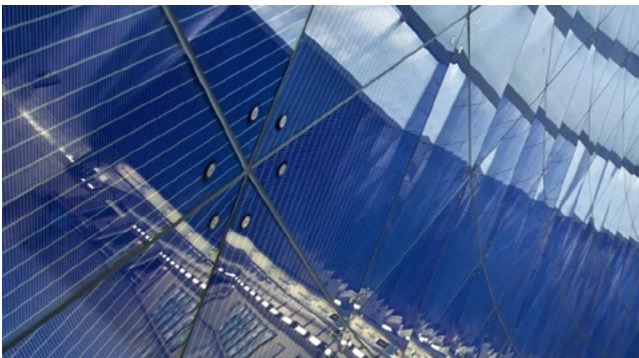


Fig. 3: Southwark underground station, close-up of curved blue glass screen designed by Beleschenko. The tiles are held by stainless steel 'spiders' connected to a steel frame

Fig. 4: Southwark underground station, the lower intermediate concourse, a curved passage lined with polished concrete blocks, is lit by natural light from the roof and illuminated by Alexander Beleschenko's glass wall

sake, Nervi agreed to take on the Italian Embassy in Brasilia, giving Paoletti a role in one of the most adventurous buildings of the decade. Paoletti entered the world of subway station design when in 1975 he secured a job with the new Hong Kong mass transit system. This involved building 36 stations within a dozen years as well as train depots. The stations were built by the cut-and-cover method – their one architectural quality was space.

When the Jubilee Line Extension got the go-ahead in 1990, one critical figure was Sir Wilfrid Newton, the accountant who had finished the Hong Kong MTR and been asked by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to sort out London Transport as its chairman. Newton brought back his team, including Roland Paoletti. Another key figure was Denis Tunnicliffe, Managing Director of London Transport.

Paoletti commissioned a group of like-minded architects with an enthusiasm for, and knowledge of engineering. The team included many of the architects who had worked for Norman Foster and Richard Rogers, the two great pioneers of high-tech in British architecture. One of them was Richard MacCormac who was given the commission for Southwark. Until then, MacCormac explained, "the engineers designed the system, then the architects dressed it up. Was it just a matter of deciding which tiles to put on the platform walls?" When Paoletti started looking for architects to design the new stations, very few were actually interested.

The Southwark Station by Richard MacCormac and Alexander Beleschenko

Some of the new Jubilee Line Stations are cut-and-cover boxes offering opportunities for extraordinary spaces on a grand and dramatic scale. The two most spectacular examples are Norman Foster's Canary Wharf and Michael Hopkins's Westminster.

Southwark was built as a station on four levels and combines cut-and-cover for the ticket hall and then traditionally drilled tunnels and spaces for the main descent to the platforms. Though MacCormac may not have been conscious of it, he was creating an underground architecture that echoes nature with cavernous spaces lit partially by natural light from above – just what is found in many natural cave systems where lofty halls alternate with confined passageways. MacCormac conceived Southwark as a journey in three acts. He also, alone of the architects working on the line, determined it should be a collaboration with an artist. He chose the artist Alexander Beleschenko, best known for his coloured glass. Beleschenko recalls: "Roland [Paoletti] had stipulated that no artists or art were to be included in the stations. MacCormac simply ignored this and employed me as a cladding consultant". The central act was a lustrous dark blue glass wall suspended in the intermediate hall which rises four stories. MacCormac took pleasure in explaining how his inspiration came from a Schinkel set design for the Magic Flute. This is no mere fancy. Schinkel's set shows an intensely blue dark sky sprinkled with stars. Beleschenko's idea was to create a backdrop of the same intensity without the benefit of stage lighting. MacCormac's first thought was that the wall should be in tiles, but Beleschenko quickly showed a far richer colour could be created with glass. The artist explained: "The method of production was crucial. The most economic way of putting colour into glass is the silkscreen process.



Figs. 5-6: Westminster underground station, 1999 by Hopkins Architects: A feat of mega engineering under Portcullis House next to the House of Commons, central London. Stacked banks of escalators hang from a dynamic network of flying concrete beams and steel tubes to create this vast dramatic backdrop.

Fig. 7: Platform level at Westminster underground station

I was interested in Rembrandt's use of crosshatching in his etchings. I evolved the idea of a ribbed pattern on the glass which would catch light on the surface. The glass wall is formed of 620 triangular pieces of glass. You can't create different patterns for 620 individual pieces of glass. So we chose four designs and each one was rotated against its neighbours to create a constantly changing pattern. I used thinner crosshatching lines at the top of each panel and denser ones at the bottom."

All this was suddenly possible on this scale thanks to the latest computer-generated geometry. The project engineers YRM Anthony Hunt had only just started using the software to do this. Hanif Kara, who was on their staff, set up his own company to work up the programme. MacCormac and Beleschenko had a model made to test the trajectory of the sun over the hall. This showed that in midsummer the sun would be high enough to shine down in the hall, illuminating the glass and creating an impressive effect. The blue glass hangs free of the curving wall so that it is lit from the back as well as front. Beleschenko stated: "We found that stretched fabric on the wall behind proved the best way of reflecting light back onto the glass and the best colour of fabric for this purpose is grey."

When the station was designed it was intended from the start that an office tower would be erected above the ticket hall, but this was not built. Although planning permission had been granted it had lapsed.

Underground Heritage in Danger and in Re-appreciation

By 2017 Transport for London was under Government pressure to increase returns from its large property holdings. The market for offices south of the river Thames had improved and there was now a plan to build a much higher tower which would require new stronger footings. This meant that MacCormac's ticket hall would have to be destroyed.

The Twentieth Century Society requested an emergency spotlisting, while Historic England recommended refusal. But it did lay out the case for listing in a substantial way, pointing out that in 1992 the Royal Fine Arts Commission had singled the station out as 'an example of patronage at its best and most enlightened'. The architects had won an RIBA bronze medal in 2000. The station was the RFAC/British Sky Broadcasting building of the year for 2000 and received a Special Award for Pursuit of Architectural and Engineering Excellence in Public Transport in the British Construction Industry Awards.

Historic England concluded: "Whilst they are part of the episodic journey through the station, the entrance hub and rotunda on Blackfriars Road are not of the same very high calibre architecturally, aesthetically or functionally as the intermediate concourse and its approach from below, and do not merit listing at Grade II*." From the Twentieth Century Society's point of view this was wrong. Even if the ticket hall was a less elaborated piece of architecture it was part of a complete design from pavement to platform. There are of course many buildings where some internal elements are plainer or simpler than the most impressive elements. But they are still part of the whole.

Despite Historic England's refusal to list Southwark Underground Station, SAVE and the Twentieth Century Society decided to fight on. To build a strong base of support I invited all

the architects of the Jubilee Line Stations I could contact to sign a letter to *The Times of London*. We wrote: “the new stations on the Jubilee Line were hailed in 1999 as the biggest architectural sensation of their kind since the Moscow Underground... As architectural writers who welcomed the new stations when they opened, and as architects of the stations themselves, we call upon Karen Bradley, the culture secretary, to carry out a survey of the Jubilee Line, assessing which of the recent stations should be preserved and celebrated as architectural masterpieces for future generations to enjoy” (signed by Marcus Binney, Jonathan Glancey, Ken Powell, Will Alsop (North Greenwich), Michael & Patty Hopkins (Westminster), Ian Ritchie (Bermondsey), Chris Wilkinson & Jim Eyre (Stratford)).

Our Letter prompted a reply from Graeme Craig, Commercial Development Director at Transport for London. We had learnt about him from a campaign to preserve another threatened underground station, South Kensington. This campaign had been run by Sophie Andreae, a former director of SAVE. She informed us that Craig was interested in design and would therefore be willing to cooperate. At a meeting he explained the pressures he was under, but emphasised Transport for London's commitment to design. He also stated that the stations continued to be valued as the face of London Transport

SAVE was determined to demonstrate both public support for the station and professional support from engineers and architects. It announced an early evening colloquium and invited Craig to come. To focus attention on the issues, SAVE called for a review of all the stations on the Jubilee Line Extension with a view to listing them as a group. Graeme Craig gave a public undertaking to consult the original architects of the stations over any future proposed alterations. This was a big step forward: not actual listing but a degree of protection.

I believe the material on the design which I have presented here shows that this underground station is indeed an outstanding work of art, architecture and engineering. The exceptional achievement of the architect in creating an *architecture parlante*, an architecture speaking its purpose, is evident not only in the detail, but also in the lack of advertisements usually found along escalators and platforms. This in turn reduces the need for signs, resulting in exceptional purity of form.

What this story demonstrates is that determined opposition can halt damaging plans even when the authorities won't provide statutory protection. However, it requires determination, advocacy, campaigning in the media, and capturing the public imagination by showing that underground architecture can be adventurous, innovative and handsome.

SAVE Britain's Heritage und die Jubilee Line-Erweiterung. Unsere Kampagne für Londons jüngste U-Bahn-Architektur

Als 2017 bekannt wurde, dass Transport for London (TfL) Pläne für den Abriss der beeindruckenden Halle der Southwark Underground Station hatte, startete SAVE sofort eine Kampagne, um ihre Bedeutung und Qualität hervorzuheben. Die neuen Stationen für die Erweiterung der Jubilee Line im Auftrag von Roland Paoletti waren herausragende Entwürfe führender Architekten. Sie waren jedoch noch nicht durch eine Denkmaleintragung geschützt. SAVE erhielt die Unterstützung vieler der beteiligten



Fig. 8: Entrance to Southwark underground station (MJP architects, 1999) via descending steps to the main ticket hall, a top-lit drum with a gentle domed roof, echoing Charles Holden's famous interwar London stations

Architekten als Unterzeichner eines Briefes an die Zeitung The Times. Ein Treffen mit den Führungskräften von Transport for London wurde vereinbart und kurz darauf wurden die Abrisspläne zurückgezogen. TfL verpflichtete sich, die ursprünglichen Architekten bei zukünftigen Änderungsvorschlägen zu konsultieren. Die Bemühungen um eine angemessene Behandlung der unterirdischen Architektur dauern an und umfassen sowohl Stationen, die genutzt werden, als auch solche, die geschlossen sind und bis vor kurzem in Vergessenheit geraten waren.

Credits

1-3: Alexander Beleschenko, 4 and 8: Peter Durant, 5-6: Dennis Gilbert

¹ The paper also links to and updates the article “Design & Heritage Management in London Underground” by Mike Ashworth, published in: Jörg Haspel, Michael Petzet, Christiane Schmückle-Mollard (eds.), *World Heritage Sites of the 20th Century – Gaps and Risks from a European Point of View* (ICOMOS – Journals of the German National Committee XLVI), Petersberg 2008.

² The Victorian Society also covered Edwardian architecture and the period up to 1914, but no further.