

# Subway 121

**Circles**

In 2016, Glasgow’s favourite round trip - sometimes the *Clockwork Orange*, usually *The Subway*, never *The Underground* - celebrated its 120<sup>th</sup> year of operation. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), in charge, honoured the anniversary with a selection of limited merchandise, cup-cake parties, some slick signage and one specially redeco-rated train car, painted to simulate the 1896 historic uniform of original car No. 55, complete with illustrated trellis gates on the carriage doors. Circulated images of celebration from this short outburst of memorialising show a network moving from the well-populated bustle of the Subway’s 19<sup>th</sup> century beginnings to the faceless blur and sheen of modern transportation, making ghosts of the future as well as the past.

Alongside the celebrations, SPT announced a further £200 million investment into the Subway’s on-going modernisation program, with Swiss/Italian consortium Stadler contracted to build 17 new train sets, alongside a complete overhaul of signalling, operational control centre, and platform screen doors. The plan: to eventually move to Unattended Train Operations (UTO), automated driver-less trains, replacing the driver’s cab at the front of the train with a forward view through a new wide-screen window.

SPT’s corporate narrative of the Subway’s history and future, informed by a managerially widespread notion that logistics and transportation sectors are inevitably on a track towards automation, has little time for the voices or stories of those who dug, built and ran the Glasgow Subway, and continue to do so. That these industrial sectors are often the most militantly well organized in trade union and labour history, partly due to their robustness against the capital-relocation ‘spatial fixes’ (moving an industry to a place with cheaper labour or other ways of extracting more surplus value) available in other sectors, has also been scrubbed out of the narrative. The forces of class, industry and geographic dispersal that forged - and were forged by - Glasgow’s network of transportation are relegated to a ‘heritage’ photomontage, where ‘People Make Glasgow’, but as consumers of the city’s brand, rather than agents and active shapers of its future. SPT’s 120 year celebrations present us with a municipal vision of ‘fully automated’ travel without the attendant ideas of a basic income, radical redistribution of wealth and democratic participation that make automation a popular idea in some left circles. Here we have a world of disappearing, gossamer humans and empty, unused platforms. A vision of silence.

This essay is a partial attempt to chart the sounds and dirt that have been scrubbed from the Subway’s history, to celebrate its *121<sup>st</sup>* year, arriving a bit late. It functions as a guideless tour, to be read alongside a ride on the Subway. The writing takes most of its historical information from John Wright and Ian Maclean’s ‘Circles Under the Clyde’, but owes much to the workers and travellers who made the Subway, rendered oblique and muffled throughout that book: Wright was a modernising ‘superintendent’ of the network during in 1970s, and both authors focus more on the Subway’s engineering and managerial changes through the years than its social history. I also draw heavily on the great work of locally based scholar Neil Gray, an academic and participant in projects like Variant Magazine and Glasgow Games Monitor, particular his freely available PhD thesis, ‘Neoliberal urbanism and spatial composition in recessionary Glasgow’. I write as a recent resident of

Glasgow, original from Bradford, Yorkshire (which has no Subway), and expect to have made many glaring omissions and mistakes, which I encourage folk to tell me about and so I can amend and expand this tour as more people interact with it.

The Subway itself is far from silent, and this essay came from regular commutes on it, enjoying its noises and sights, certainly never quiet or blank. The tour takes one loop through the network, with a couple of backs and forth to see both inner and outer lines, and to help fit a chronology onto a circle, which never easy. Hopefully it can be supplemented at some point by far more actual voices from those who have worked on and used the subway over the years, but at present it is an amateur’s sketch, made mainly from historical research and many loud rides.

**Digging in**

Opened on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1896, the Glasgow Subway is the third-oldest underground metro system in the world, after the London Underground and the Budapest Metro. Sounds of labour and history echo through its two concentric circles, spiralling right back to those first dug out tunnels, from which the route has barely deviated.

The city at this point had already established itself within a vast network of global transport infrastructure, with Glasgow and the Clyde situated at a temporally ideal point for transatlantic movement of goods and people, as well as physically producing vast amounts of shipping and locomotive stock. The city’s growth into what we now call the ‘Second City of Empire’ from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards - forged initially through tobacco and sugar from slavery plantations and colonial expansion in the Americas, but continuing into the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the West Indies cotton trade - found a particular apotheosis in the city’s 1938 Empire Exhibition, along with the legacies of ‘Tobacco Lords’ like Andrew Buchanan (after whom Buchanan street is named) John Glassford (who has a street named after him too, and owned plantations in Virginia and Maryland) and William Cunninghame (whose former mansion now houses the Gallery of Modern Art) still very visible today.

Construction on the Subway began in 1887, following a petition for funds to parliament a few years earlier, preceeded by 3 unsuccessful attempts to gain money for similar projects. The late 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Glasgow was a time of rapid urbanisation and change, as rural workers cleared from their land in the Highlands joined large numbers who had made the move to Glasgow from the Lowlands in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Neil Gray explains, “These immigrants were largely concentrated in and around the Old Town following the westwards exodus of the wealthier classes to more airy climes in a classic European West End/East End socio-spatial divide” creating intense pressure on infrastructure, both in terms of transportation and housing, as rent increases averaged 47% over the city from 1861 to 1911.

Gray goes on to explain that with “the City of Glasgow Union Railway Act of 1864, large areas of slum housing were demolished when railway lines were driven through the Gallowgate and Saltmarket”, with “around 20,000 people displaced by railway expansion”. While the city was re-shaped from above by one kind of track and sleeper, the original architects of the Subway attempted to profit from beneath. The city saw huge influxes of capital and labour during this time, with an established class of wealthy industrialists seeking ways to manage and move their workers, as well as hoard and accrue fixed capital in the form of machinery and infrastructure.

Plans for the Subway aimed to capitalise on this moment, and focused from the beginning on the West of the city (never further east than St Enoch), adding a new undertow beneath the industrial flows of the vast Clyde and Govan shipyards.

A map of the Glasgow Subway network, showing the two concentric circles and the various streets and landmarks it passes through.

**Route** : *St Enoch à West Street \*get out and change\* à Bridge Street à Buchanan Street à Cowcaddens à St George’s Cross à Kelvinbridge à Hillhead à Partick \*get out and change\* à Kelvinhall \*get out and change\* à Govan à Ibrox à Cessnock à Kinning Park à Shields Road*

## Tour begins!

**St Enoch – Early Plans**

We start at this most easterly point of the network, the site of the company headquarters of the original Glasgow District Subway Railway Company, and original entrance to the subway, now a coffee shop, which you can see on arrival into St Enoch Square. An ornate, Jacobean, late Victorian red sandstone structure - designed by James Miller in 1896 - it was carefully preserved during the modernisation of the Subway in 1977, even being jacked up in the air for a while, during reconstruction of the subsurface platforms.

We begin before the Subway was officially opened, with the city ruled by trams (first established, 1872), ferries, horse pulled omnibuses, and heavy foot traffic. Alongside the growing network of railways, we could find, near here, the official oldest bit of underground railway in Glasgow: not the Subway, but the 3.1 miles of rail between High St and Chaining Cross, part of the Glasgow and city district railway, and opened in 1886. We board through the renovated vista of the original entrance, at the foot of Buchanan Street, and begin the life of the Subway itself. Taking the outer line to the network’s most unloved station:

**West Street – The Clatter and Cables**

The digging of 6 and half miles of tunnel during the construction of the Subway, mostly by hand, crossing twice beneath the Clyde, was no easy feat. As the reputable sources at British Paranormal explain: “One of the grimest tasks that confronted the workers who constructed Glasgow Subway was excavating human remains from the city’s medieval plague pits. The pits were impromptu mass graves, hastily prepared to cater for the sudden glut of deaths resulting from the outbreaks. One such pit was alleged to have been encountered whilst digging the stretch of tunnel that runs from West Street to Shields Road. Workers became concerned by the texture of the earth they were digging and alarmed by the regular discovery of bone fragments and teeth. Nonetheless, progress had to be made and soon a tunnel had been constructed, but workers continued to be suspicious of the area. They were right to be cautious, as it was this stretch of tunnel that gave rise to the story of the Clatter, an amorphous cloud-like spirit that would emerge from a wall, appearing first as a small hovering ball of light, no bigger than a golf ball, only to swell up, extending and enlarging suddenly, so as to engulf an entire area and anyone stood near. Its name derives from the noise it is supposed to produce, described by one worker as an intense clattering, like dozens of tin pans falling from a wall simultaneously and continuously. Hapless workers who encountered the Clatter during their time in the tunnels reported seeing the anguished faces of many long deceased souls in the mists that suddenly surrounded them. Following the reopening of Glasgow’s Subway in 1897, there were no fur-

ther reports of this mysterious entity.”

Between West St and Shields road were the original engine houses for the Subway’s pre-electric cable system. Cables were 6 and 7/8ths miles long and weighed about 57 tons, one for each line, and ran beneath the train cars on each circle, constantly moving, so that Subway ‘gripmen’ used a special device to clutch the moving cable, and move with it. The engine houses, still visible next door to Scotland Street School, housed a 190 ft shed for the ‘tension run’ which aimed to keep the cable taut regardless of temperature, and used a selection of spools to guide the cable underground to the track level.

*West Street is also infamous for being one of the least used stations in the network – a note from SPT management states how one Xmas day in 1981 nobody at all alighted or entered the Subway at West Street – but it may yet still be redeemed: If the Crossrail Glasgow project to connect Queen’s Street and Central is approved, then West Street station will be redeveloped as an interchange between the new surface railway and the Subway.*

**Bridge Street – Breathing the Air**

Tunnelling was dangerous and sometimes deadly. A fire broke out in 1894, in the air lock tunnel near Bridge Street, with a number of workers having to breathe through the compressed air line of a grouting machine in a smoked out tunnel, until they were eventually rescued 22 hours later. Some of the hardest digging was in the silt and clay around the Clyde.

*In, 2016 At Bridge Street station, SPT installed an air source heat pump (ASHP) to recycle the air from the tunnels to heat station premises and domestic hot water. The company use a water source heat pump (WSHP) to recycle the water from the tunnels to do the same thing at St. George’s Cross station.*

**Buchanan Street – Opening**

Glasgow District Subway opened in 1896, with queues from 8am and over 1400 people boarding the service in the first 4 hours. At 3pm a complete breakdown occurred on the outer circle, causing momentary chaos as stranded passengers were forced to walk along the lines back to the nearest station. This was followed later in the evening by a full speed collision at Buchanan Street and St Enoch, injuring 18 passengers but none seriously. With such a disastrous start, the Subway was closed again for further work, until opening properly in January 1897. With a 10p childs ticket and no limit on ‘circulations’ lots of people went round and round repeatedly during these early months, which managers saw as adding congestion on the lines. Though there have been attempts to curb this practice through the years it is still possible to sit on the Subway for as many loops as you’d like.

**Cowcaddens – First Complaints and Good Smells**

The site of the first official Subway complaint, in 1897, as a solicitor (who else!) writes to the Glasgow District Subway Company to complain that the so-called ‘Turnstile Girls’, “are practically idle all day reading penny dreadfuls; and should be supplied with cloth and instructed to go out occasionally and clean the iron turnstiles. They’re frequently very greasy and dirty.” Other complaints about Cowcaddens spoke of “a very bad smell of sewage”. Alongside such nastier odours was a pungent smell, often attributed to archangel tar or creosote, which as one contributor to the ‘Hidden Glasgow’ forums attests, became a key site of Subway memories for many:

“The smell of today’s Subway is not the same of the one from bygone era (well that’s what my nostrils tell me). The smell at the original Hillhead Subway Station was quite something and from time to time there is a faint aroma of that 'original' smell.

Different opinions have popped up regarding the smell, mainly in forums such as these, but I clearly remember the smell and for me it has never been replicated since the modernisation programme back in the 80’s.

Kelvinbridge was different from Hillhead - two completely contrasting smells - and they were two completely different stations, but if you were to ask me to describe it...God that would be like asking me to explain toothache to someone who wears false teeth....

There used to be a shop in Glasgow’s Sauchiehall Street (sadly, I cannot remember which one but nearer to Charing Cross) and from time to time when I went into it, the memories of the old Subway came flooding back because of the smell. It was distinctive, damp - possibly, oily - maybe, but unique it most certainly was!”

*In 2014 Designer Kate Mclean, who made a sensory map of Glasgow, found that this Subway odour was the smell most commonly associated with the city, calling it “a warm, humid, metallic sponge.”*

**St George’s Cross – Organising**

As the Subway became a regular, well used fixture of Glasgow’s transport network, its staff also began to organise as workers, as did many across the city. 1902 saw the establishment of a ‘Staff Friendly Society’, with the following decades seeing a rise in militant working class action, often with transport workers heavily involved, an era that came to be known as ‘Red Clydeside’. This coincided with another huge population influx to Glasgow during the First World War, as workers were fed into the large munitions factories, as well as an already stretched and exploitative rentier market. The famous 1915 rent strikes, catalysed around the trial of eighteen rent striking munitions workers following a massive women-led demonstration on St. Enoch Square, and further demonstrations and industrial actions involving tens of thousands of Glaswegians, forced the Government to introduce the first-ever Rent Restrictions Act in 1915. Strikes on the Subway network itself in 1919 focused on bringing down the length of the working week, at that point averaging 55 hours. On 17th Jan, a strike committee formed and began organising workers into pickets (including here at St George’s Cross!), but the company recruited new staff and eventually broke the strike with no concessions beyond a promise against victimisation. This promise was not kept, as 3 employees were sentenced for ‘assaulting’ another (scabbing) employee, and we’re given jailtime despite protests from the Scottish Trade Union Congress.

Such militancy fed into a general city-wide mood that culminated, on Jan 31<sup>st</sup> that month, in the ‘Battle of George Square’, one of the most intense and large-scale demonstrations in the history of Glasgow. With unions and workers campaigning for shorter working hours, backed by widespread strike action, and the shock of the recent Russian Revolution inspiring workers (and putting fear into the ruling local classes and UK government) clashes between workers and police became fierce. Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, ordered the army into Glasgow in an effort to control the terms of violence and allay fears of a Bolshevik-inspired uprising.

In 1923, Glasgow Corporation Transport Department, who operated the city’s tramways (a tumultuous site of worker militancy during the period), bought the Subway, and both Subway and Tramworkers joined in solidarity with the striking coal workers of the 1926 General Strike. James Dalrymple, General Manager of Glasgow Corporation Tramways from 1904 to 1926, brought in student scabs as bodyguards for management during the strike and refused to reinstate all strikers after the dispute, but was overruled by more senior managers wary of contagious

militancy. His subsequent, sullen departure following this clash saw Mr Dalrymple leave the city to go run the Sao Paolo tramway in Brazil.

*Strikes and industrial action on the Subway continued into contemporary times but, as in other sectors and parts of the UK, with decreasing levels of militancy and worker autonomy. In 2002 bosses sacked 35 Glasgow Subway drivers over wildcat strike action, with workers denied support at the time by The Transport and General Workers' Union. Official disputes in 2005/6 and 2014 saw some concessions, but the SPT has been largely more successful at quashing worker organising than similar operations like the London Underground.*

**Kelvinbridge – End of the Cable**

As we travel to Kelvinbridge we enter into the end of clutch-and-cable era, steadily replaced between 1932-1940, to make way for electrification of the Subway network. However, cables of a different kind were still used at this station, for a hoist operated lift from near the bridge at road level, down to the Subway platform, next to the river. This lift operated for the first few decades of the Subway’s use, before being discontinued in 1938, but then reinstated for a few years in 1967. Kevinbridge has kept its original island platform layout, where other busy stations were redeveloped to have two platforms, and is also the deepest station in the network. The deepest part of tunnel is between Kelvinbridge and Hillhead at 112ft.

**Hillhead – She’s Electric**

The Subway’s first electric service started in 1935. Glasgow Evening Times that day, March 16<sup>th</sup>, covered the change with a piece pointing out how the ‘old’ Subway had made ‘every passenger a critic’ with a poem:

*Folks used to shout out for the gore, Of the poor town councillor. Because he never did a thing People said “He ought to hing, Ought be sent back to college – The Subway’s still on cable haulage!” He just slumbered at George Square, Every Thursday he was there – At least that’s what the voters said, and then he proved he had a head. Now all our wrongs are rectified – The Subway is electrified!*

Attitudes towards the Subway as late, noisy, and dirty abound from this time onwards, but almost always with an affectionate tint. Moving into an electric era was a costly and difficult operation, and it came at the height of a wide-spread economic depression: in 1933, some 30 per cent of the city’s population was out of work. This era sees some early ‘regeneration’ and state investment ideas being trailed, alongside some attempts to ‘rebrand’ out of crises: in 1939 the Municipal Transport Committee changed the network’s name from ‘Subway’ to ‘Underground’, but Glaswegians refused to follow suit, and it was officially returned to ‘Subway’ in 2003. Hillhead was also one of the first stations to have adverts around this time, starting in 1937, as the Subway owners began to experiment with different revenue options for what was still a very costly and ‘labour intensive’ operation. By 1949 the network had 240 staff, with ticket collectors, conductors, turnstile operators, drivers, then also 90 men & 6 women in the Broomloan workshops: welders, bodymakers, coach painters. It’s clear there were many women staff through the history of the subway, though it’s difficult to get much detail, one small comment in the ‘Circles Under the Clyde’ book talks about how the network was nicknamed the ‘Glasgow Women’s Railway’ because of having “so many females on the payroll”.

### Tour continues >>>

## Partick / Merkland Street – Closed & Bombed

Up until 1977, this area was home to the only station on the system that has now been closed permanently: Merkland Street. It was located 25 metres to the south-west of its replacement, Partick, and you can still see evidence of Merkland Street station's existence when passing between Partick and Govan, although the platforms and station buildings no longer remain. In 1940, during World War II, a German bomb landed on Beith Street bowling green, about 50 metres away from Merkland Street, and exploded either above or inside the tunnels, with a large amount of debris blocking the line, leading to the network being closed for 131 days. This preceded the intensive Luftwaffe bombing of the city's munitions and shipyards in March 1941, referred to now as the Clydebank Blitz, which left tens of thousands of Glaswegians homeless and proved formative for future 'redevelopment' of the city's infrastructure. Beyond this episode, Merkland Street is probably mostly remembered now through the famous Glasgow Underground Song, written by Cliff Hanley and Ian Gourley, and popularised by Jack Milroy and Ricky Fulton. It goes:

*There's Partick Cross and Cessnock, Hillhead and Merkland Street, George's Cross and Govan Cross where all the people meet. West Street, Shields Road, the train go round and round, you've never lived unless you've been on the Glasgow underground.*

*// I know a lot of folk go fancy places at the fair; they like to sail in steamers or to hurtle through the air. But I've a favourite route that goes to many ports of call, although unless you'd look you'd never notice me at all.*

There's...

*// They tell me that Majorca is a dandy place to be, Or Switzerland or Italy or even gay Paree, There's so many lovely beauty spots on the Clyde of the First, But I would rather always travel down below the earth*

There's...

*// There's names that ring with magic that thrill you through and through, The seem to call you back with an enchantment ever new, Those places faraway are like a song that's sweetly sung , You roll them round your mouth and feel them sliding off your tongue,*

There's...

## Kelvinhall – Peaks

Only renamed Kelvinhall in 1977, we land in what was, in 1945, Partick Cross, during another period of huge change for Glasgow and the Subway. With WW2 leaving scores of decimated tenements, alongside a deceleration of industry at the nearby shipyards & docks, the years after 1945 saw the city changing fast, as those in charge of its industrial infrastructure, housing and transport failed to adapt. 1948-9 were the busiest years on record for the Subway system, peaking at 37.3 Million users through that ear – as comparison, SPT figures counted 13 million passengers from 2014-15. The network's passenger peaks coincided with a general population increase across Scotland, as emigration levels to the

US and Canada subsided with the aftermath of war and depression, and returning soldiers came back to mismanaged and exploitative housing market. Moral panics around the state of overcrowded and badly maintained housing in the city erupted during this time, often animated by a barely concealed racism and classism in sensationalist journalistic stories that often had little or no critique of how landlord and government practices were at the root of such problems.

The chief engineer of the Glasgow Corporation, Robert Bruce, sought to 'tackle' this post-war housing crisis with a massive redrawing of the city's urban infrastructure, focused on dispersing urban residents of the inner-city into new housing, either through (in Bruce's model) modernist high-risers or (with the competing Abercrombie plans) to the outskirts of the city, and demolishing much of Glasgow to make way for a new rigidly planned grid system. As Neil Gray argues, "the combined elements of these master plans, "unleashed a period of creative destruction" (Quoting Fyfe, 1996) that reached a peak in the 1957 Comprehensive Development Area (CDA)", fundamentally shaping the city as it is today, "By 1975, the city had reached 95,000 demolitions, contributing to massive population decline and enormous social cost". One of the most contemporarily inescapable parts of the Bruce recommendations, the M8 motorway, was grafted through and around the city from the late 1960s, further contributing to this levelling and re-drawing of Glasgow, as stations like Shield's Road, St George's Cross and West Street had their surroundings flattened to make way for this 'highway of the future'. Other familiar transportation methods were edged out of existence in the coming decades too, as the last trams stopped in 1962, followed by the trolley bus system in 1967. A urban infrastructure that had once been tightly condensed around the Clyde ship yards – so much in fact that many workers had an hour for lunch to go home and eat - found its channels of movement pushed towards car owners, suburban enclaves and commuter towns.

## Govan – Modernisation

Few areas felt the occasional scrutiny and regular indifference of distant urban and industrial planners like Govan (whose station was named Govan Cross until 1977). The 1950s saw large-scale tenement clearances in the area alongside a city-wide process of deindustrialisation focused on the nearby docks and shipyards. Often understood in historical accounts in determinist terms, as part of an unavoidable slide towards 'globalisation', these industrial shifts fail to take into consideration the local and national governmental decisions influencing the 'decline', which constantly favoured the short term desires and profits of bosses over long term strategy for industry and sustainability. As Checkland (quoted in Gray) argues, those in charge of the shipyards and docks in Glasgow enjoyed "low taxation, a virtually free choice of industrial location, minimal restraints on pollution, and vast areas over which the Factory Acts or other legislation had no

control" (Checkland, 1976), with very little scrutiny (from authorities) of their responsibilities to the workforce or local area and its future.

These seismic changes in the industry and housing of the city form a complex backdrop to 'modernisation' of the Subway, which from the late 1960s became the responsibility of the Greater Glasgow Passenger Transport Executive (forerunner of the SPT), which took over responsibility for the line from Glasgow Corporation. Most histories of the Subway lump these decades together under a heading of 'decline' or 'deprivation', speeding forward from the long dole queues and demolition jobs of the era into the supposed shiny comfort of the 1990s. Yet, despite defeats and hardship, the 1970s in Glasgow also saw thousands out in support of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders builders 'Work-in', with young shop steward Jimmy Reid gaining prominence as their now-famous spokesman.

As the workers of that industry defeated Heath's Tories and saw the Shipyards briefly nationalised by Callaghan in 1977 (before being privatised again by Thatcher), the workers of the Glasgow Subway oversaw the biggest change of the system on record.

'Modernisation' involved a wholesale overhaul of cars and carriages (some of which were still from 1896), plus the introduction of CCTV, escalators (including one 'travelator' at Buchanan Street!) and early attempts at automated turnstiles. Three stations were rebuilt completely, six stations received additional platforms and Govan, at the heart of the network, was totally redesigned. The old depot at Broomloan Road, where cars had previously been lifted from the subway line by a large crane in order to be serviced, was rebuilt to allow them to exit via rail. All redundant fittings and equipment from the old system were sold at a public sale at Broomloan Works, with hundreds of ordinary Glaswegians queuing to buy up a memento of the now 70-year-old system.

*One thing that persisted through the changes was the Subway colour palette, which has managed to remain remarkably stable through various rebrands and acronyms overalls; 'Govan Orange' or 'Govan Brown' is apparently its official name!*

## Ibrox – Blue Lights

The Subway reopened after 3 years in April 1980, though it was 'inaugurated' by a visit from Queen Elizabeth II in 1979 with a trip down from Buchanan Street to St Enoch, with management buying in a load of large pot plants to hide the un-finished work, and the whole day almost derailed by a hoax bomb at the former station.

Ibrox had its single station divided into two to help ease football traffic, and had its name changed from Copland Road, as part of the modernisation project. Ranger's fans compromise a particularly loud part of the Subway's sounds, as any accidental match day traveller will attest. In contrast, the complete lack of east end transportation links for Celtic support-

ers or Northerly ones for Partick Thistle leaves them less inclined to Subway travel, as proposed 'East end circle' and 'Northern' extensions have never materialised.

Along with an underlying distaste for union activity, 'Circles Under The Clyde', the key history of the Subway on which much of this essay is based, has various subtle indications of a similar bias. John Wright, co-author of the book and superintendent, showed The Queen around that day in 1979, and retells a story of Glasgow Ranger's fans cheering an announcement on the tannoy that a stalled train was 'waiting for the lights to turn blue', rather than green. One comment about how the Subway was nicknamed 'The Pakistan and Donegal Light Railway', is made towards the end of the book, without explanation, presumably in reference to the number of Irish, Pakistani and other migrant workers who found jobs in the network. This, along with the large number of women working on the Subway over the years, is hardly elaborated on in 'Circles Under The Clyde' and deserves a serious historical exploration. The class composition of Glasgow, and its Subway, has never mapped onto spurious ideas of a nostalgically positioned 'male, white working class', and attempts to centre its social history need to avoid lapsing into such tropes. To do so properly would take the kind of proper primary research unavailable to this particular (amateur, spare time) project, but it felt important to flag this here and hope to rectify it in the future.

## Cessnock - Miles Better

Along with Kelvinhall, Cessnock was one of only two stations to retain its pre-modernisation surface buildings and entryway. It's also the part of the line nearest to the surface, with houses around here so near to the tunnels that workers would sometimes accidentally poke through a kitchen floor.

While Cessnock began to fit neatly into what would become a sharp divide between Subway 'Heritage' and 'Modernisation', the wider city was being driven down road of heavy brand identity. Michael Kelly, Lord Provost from 1980-1984, oversaw the now infamous 'Glasgow's Miles Better' campaign, having been heavily influenced by the New York Department of Commerce's 1977 'I Love New York' campaign. As Neil Gray argues, "The campaign is known for masking New York's emergence as the prototypical city of neoliberal revanchism, yet this relation is conveniently elided by Glasgow's urban boosters despite similar revanchist policies in the city," reversing what were perceived ideological 'losses' to the social democratic post-war years. Large scale social and democratic investment was precluded by a 'brand change' that linked in well with large civic events like the 1988 National Garden Festival, though the Subway was such a hostile environment for plants that fake ones had to be used! Top of the pile for events pushing this new, regenerated vision of Glasgow was the city's successful bid for the 1990 European City of Culture, which became a benchmark for arts led, neoliberal city regeneration projects. This included a focus on

'pro-growth' and low taxation urban areas, attracting tourism, and encouraging a large service economy to coincide with state-sponsored arts quarters.

*Against this tide of neoliberal displacement and gentrification, organisations like West Gap – founded in Partick in 1997 as an "anti-poverty community group run by and for people in Glasgow who have first hand experience of living in poverty" and moved to nearby Paisley Road West in 2014 – build on this history of working class self-organizing and anti-capitalist solidarity. Also nearby to Cessnock is the Unity Centre, who "give practical support and solidarity to all asylum seekers and other migrants in Scotland", operating since 2006 out of an office on Ibrox Street.*

## Kinning Park – Who's Culture?

Glasgow's rebranding as what Richard Florida calls a 'Creative City' helped mask persistent levels of inequality and poverty across the city, indeed, studies have found there is a "strong correlation between inequality and creativity: the more 'creative' a region is, the more inequality you will find there" (see Gray 2009). But the 1990s also saw continued struggles to assert community ownership and self-determination in housing and space around Glasgow, in 1997 there was a 55 Day sit-in occupation of Kinning Park Complex (just opposite the Subway Station) in opposition to council cuts, an action that saved the space, which runs as community interest company to this day. From 1990-93 the Worker's City group, who had formed in 1988 as a response to the branding of the 'Merchant City' started making and distributing their paper, The Glasgow Keelie, in direct response to the 'Capital of Culture' roll out. As writer James Kelman, a key member of the group, recounts, they wanted to challenge "the grossness of the fallacy" that Glasgow existed because of the entrepreneurial acumen of the colonial Tobacco Lords; these entrepreneurs, he reminds us, made their slavery-based wealth by "the simple expedience of not paying the price of labour" (see Gray 2015).

## Shields Road – Ghosts of the Future

As the Subway passed into a new millennium, much discussion turned to possible expansions beyond its original 2 concentric, circular lines. Between 2005 and 2007 SPT embarked on a long and expensive consultation process about extending the system in the West End, East End, South Side and Glasgow Harbour areas of the city. Consultants recommended major refurbishment of the existing rolling stock and stations, at an overall cost of £270 million, alongside a possible £2.3 billion expansion that included a new 'East End Circle', with seven new stations at St. Mungo's, Onslow, Duke Street, Celtic Park, Dalmarnock, Newhall and Gorbals. This was aimed to coincide with the city's 2014 Commonwealth Games bid, another project that saw massive displacement of city residents in the name of 'redevelopment', but the plans never came to fruition and many East End residents are still very poorly served by a city transportation system that values car owners above all else.

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, in 2016 this modernisation project was expanded to include a massive overhaul of trains, signalling and the operational control centre, with the addition of newly see-through platform screen doors – that SPT hopes will pave the way for Unattended Train Operations (UTO). Designs for the trains focus on a 'new forward view through a new wide-screen window at the front of the train', a driverless window into an automated future.

## Conclusion

The Glasgow Subway's 120<sup>th</sup> birthday was marked with an outpouring of affection and memory, channelled by current management into a slick 'modernisation' narrative that sought to erase the messy, noisy and contested ways in which The Subway, and its surroundings, has been a constant sight of class struggle and exploitation. Its fixity, beneath our feet, while a city grew around it, invites contemporary Glaswegians to consider the labour and strife, along with the bungled management and corruption, which went into fashioning the urban space around us. There is a vast array of stories, ghosts and history buried down there, all of it exceeding corporate frames or branding exercises. This proper cacophony, often *too* loud, is what I've attempted to very partially sweep through in this tour/essay/tape. I encourage you to dismount here at Shield's Road, as I entered many times on a daily commute, and look around at the legacy of this great circle in the ground: the nearby ruined engine houses (marked for redevelopment), the snaking M8, the flattened surroundings of what has become a perennial 'transport hub'; and consider how we move around this city, and who moves us. We are those spectres of the future, and we shouldn't let ourselves be so easily scrubbed away or silenced. Any automated utopia must consider the material labours involved in its creation, and if the Subway teaches us anything, it is that where some see repeated cycles of accumulation and crisis, we might see grounds for new kinds of revolution.

## Work Mentioned and Further Reading

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Wright, J. & Maclean, I (1997) *Circles under the Clyde: A history of the Glasgow Underground*, Capital Transport

Pictures from '120 years of Subway' at SPT website: <http://www.spt.co.uk/120/>

Variant Magazine: <http://www.variant.org.uk/>

Spirit of Revolt archive: <http://www.spiritofrevolt.info/>