

King's Cross: tragedy on the Tube

Kings Cross St Pancras Tube station is barely recognisable from its appearance 30 years ago. To coincide with the arrival of the new Eurostar terminal and High Speed 1 above, the station has undergone one of the most extensive and (at £810 million) expensive refurbishments on the London Underground.

But it remains one of London's biggest transport interchanges, as it was when disaster struck at the station on November 18 1987. And it is still perhaps London's most complicated Tube station, with platforms on four levels serving six lines. Importantly, these include both the 'deep-level' Victoria, Piccadilly and Northern lines, and the 'sub-surface' Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith and City lines - although the latter was classed as part of the Metropolitan Line at the time of the fire.

That Wednesday evening 30 years ago, the rush hour had passed peacefully, with the usual 100,000 people passing through the station. It was once the passenger numbers had begun to ease that Philip Brickell, a 'leading railman' stationed on the gates at the Tube ticket hall, was told of a wad of burning tissue at the foot of the Victoria Line escalator.

This did not prompt alarm. London Underground records show that between 1958 and 1987, there were over 400 fires on escalators alone. But staff were heavily discouraged from referring to fires at all - instead, the preferred term was a "smouldering".

Brickell left the gateline and descended the escalator, where he saw the flames. Having whacked them out with a magazine, he returned to his post.

The smouldering on the Victoria Line escalator may have had no connection to the blaze on the separate Piccadilly Line escalator that engulfed the station 15 minutes later. But it neatly illustrates the culture of London Underground back in 1987. In the words of London Underground chief Tony Ridley, fires were seen as "part of the nature of the oldest, most extensive, most complex underground railway in the world". And calling in the fire brigade was a last resort.

Another visible difference back then was the nature of many Tube escalators. Between 1931 and 1961, 108 'M-series' escalators had been installed - many of which were still in service in 1987. From the 1960s, however, new escalators - including those serving the

On November 18 1987, a devastating fire that started beneath an escalator at King's Cross St Pancras Tube station claimed the lives of 31 people. CONRAD LANDIN looks back at the circumstances of the fire, and the inquiry that followed

Victoria Line platforms at King's Cross - were fully constructed from metal.

The 'MH' escalators serving the Piccadilly Line platforms at King's Cross were designed for high rises and large numbers of passengers. Their steps consisted of metal-backed plywood boards topped with maple wood cleats - and shaped oak risers fastened to sheet metal. In their original condition, there was a single metal 'fire cleat' on each side of the step, designed to prevent cigarettes and matches falling through the gaps.

From 1984, following a fire at Oxford Circus, the Underground had introduced a partial smoking ban. In 1985, this was extended to all areas within ticket barriers - including the escalators at King's Cross. However, the public inquiry into the King's Cross fire found there was "evidence that passengers continued to smoke in the Underground" regardless, and "people tended to light up while going up the escalator to leave the station".

At 1929 on that night, passenger Philip Squire noticed a small fire underneath a step near the top of one of two upward Piccadilly Line escalators. When he reached the ticket hall, he reported the fire at the booking office. Booking clerk Derek Newman telephoned relief station inspector Christopher Hayes - the man in charge of the deep level lines at King's Cross.

Squire was not the only one to notice. Another passenger pressed the emergency stop. Julian Jeffs, a barrister travelling to catch a main line train at Paddington, had just stepped onto the escalator when it ground to a halt.

"As we were so little advanced we cursed cheerfully, got off, and got on the right-hand escalator which was still proceeding upwards," Jeffs said in his witness statement. "When we were about halfway up I saw a woman walking up the stationary escalator, getting about halfway, and then turning round and going downwards as fast as she could possibly move."

Having seen a policeman also frantically

rushing up and down the escalator, Jeffs took a closer look, and saw smoke but no flames. Jeffs and his wife changed onto the sub-surface lines and caught their train at Paddington. It was not until he arrived home and turned on the news that he realised the scale of the fire.

"I was very surprised by this, and think I had a lucky escape," he recalls now.

Brickell - the ticket collector to whom the first fire had been reported - went to inspect, accompanied by two policemen who were in the station's temporary operations room. One of these officers decided to summon the fire brigade, but had to go back up to the surface to make the call, as his radio did not work underground.

Meanwhile, relief station inspector Hayes inspected the escalator's lower machine room - but saw or smelt nothing.

The Piccadilly Line escalators at King's Cross were not without fire precautions. In

the 1940s they had been fitted with 'water fog' equipment, which suppresses fires when the water it ejects turns to steam. Tube bosses had fitted the jets with the intention of turning them on every night, but after this was found to corrode the machinery this was revised to once a fortnight. In the years ahead of the fire, this slackened further. Incidentally, back in the 1940s, it had also been noted that applying the fog each night helped to clear accumulated fluff from escalators.

Back on November 18 1987, at 1938, relief station inspector Hayes accessed the upper machine room. There he saw the fire, and attempted to tackle it with an extinguisher -

but could not get near enough to do so. He was "preoccupied and forgot about" the water fog equipment, according to the inquiry report.

At 1942 the first fire crew arrived on the scene, commanded by station officer Colin Townsley of Soho fire station. With his colleague - temporary sub-officer Roger Bell - he went to assess the fire, which Bell said was by now the size of a large cardboard box. ➔

The charred remains of the escalators where the fire started at King's Cross St Pancras Tube station on November 18 1987. An inquiry established that the cause had been a match carelessly discarded by a smoker, despite a ban coming into force two years earlier. PRESS ASSOCIATION.



“In the words of London Underground chief Tony Ridley, fires were seen as ‘part of the nature of the oldest, most extensive, most complex underground railway in the world’. And calling in the fire brigade was a last resort.”

➔ Returning to the ticket hall, he called for four fire pumps and ambulances.

At around the same time, the last Piccadilly Line trains let passengers enter what would shortly become the deadliest public transport fire in a generation. Police had requested that Victoria and Piccadilly Line trains should not stop at the station several minutes earlier, at 1940.

With confused passengers now congregating at the foot of the flaming Piccadilly Line escalators, British Transport Police officers decided to take control. They directed passengers to instead exit to the ticket hall via the Victoria Line escalators, which were metal and free of fire.

Passengers on Northern Line trains continued to alight, however. One was 17-year-old Candida Richardson, who had boarded a southbound train with a friend at Camden Town, with the intention of changing at King's Cross for the Piccadilly Line.

At around 1945 she exited the train with fellow passengers, and with no signs of anything untoward she headed up the short escalators towards the Piccadilly Line. Halfway up, a member of Underground staff shouted over, telling her there was a fire in the station. At the top of the escalator another Tube worker directed the group right towards the Victoria Line platforms, where by now they could smell and see smoke.

"It seemed so shambolic," she recalls 30 years on. "It wasn't scary because you didn't really know what was going on - you didn't

The heat of the fire was enough to melt the paint on ceilings and walls. PRESS ASSOCIATION.



“ Safety officers told the inquiry they felt like ‘voices in the wilderness’. The Tube’s chief fire inspector said he repeatedly found escalator machinery in a bad state of repair. ”

know the full scale of it at the time. But you could smell there was something burning. We'd got on the Tube, and we'd actually got out of a Tube into that station that was on fire, and that was shocking."

Richardson crammed onto a packed Victoria Line train - this could well have been the 1946 departure flagged down by Tube staff, which evacuated between 150 and 200 people. Some were left on the platform, but a further two trains then stopped to pick up passengers. By 1955 no passengers were left on the deep level platforms.

Once she was evacuated, Richardson abandoned her plans for the evening and went home, with no knowledge of what had been going on above her at King's Cross. "We'd not been stopped by anyone, even by the police," she says now. On watching the news that evening, she thought "hang on a second, I was there", and got in touch with the authorities to provide a statement. Had she attempted to leave the station by the Victoria Line escalators, as police officers had been advising around the

same time, things could have turned out very differently.

The clock at the head of the Piccadilly Line escalator stopped at 1945. It had been immobilised by the heat of a massive fireball which engulfed the ticket hall, killing some passengers immediately and leaving others with severe burns that would affect them for life. People were screaming, and the ticket hall was full of smoke so thick that escape for many was down to chance and guesswork. This was the 'flashover' - and much of the ensuing investigation would focus on just how it came to be.

PC Stephen Hanson, of the British Transport Police, was shouting for passengers ascending the Victoria Line escalator to hurry up. He was crossing the short distance to the Piccadilly Line escalators in the ticket hall when he saw a jet of flame shoot up from the burning escalator, hit the ticket hall ceiling and quickly engulf the whole area. He was thrown off balance, and crawling back towards the Victoria Line escalators shouted for passengers to keep low and make for the exits.

Shortly before 1930 Richard Bates, a sub-editor at the *Guardian* newspaper, had boarded a Metropolitan Line train. His usual route home to Finsbury Park involved a change at King's Cross. When he arrived at King's Cross after the initial one-stop leg of his journey, he noticed smoke on the Piccadilly Line escalator - but not enough to alarm him, and he passed across to the Victoria Line escalators. He reached the northbound platform, but around three minutes later "two policemen and a railway official ran onto the platform", he recalled in a witness statement.

Firemen with breathing apparatus congregate on the west site of St Pancras Road, prior to making entry to the Underground station. Thirty-one people were killed by the fire. LONDON FIRE BRIGADE.



Along with other passengers on the platform, Bates made his way back up the Victoria Line escalators.

"I got to the top of the escalator, took one step off, and I immediately saw flames about three or four feet high from the same place where I saw smoke earlier," he said.

"As I took another step forward I heard a loud whoosh and a fireball shot across the ticket hall towards us. I put my hands up to my face and crouched down."

Bates threw himself down the upward escalator back towards the Victoria Line platform. At the foot, he was doused with a fire extinguisher - his hair and jacket had been alight.

Station Officer Townsley, the original commander at the scene, was killed. He was found at the bottom of the steps leading to the Pancras Road exit. The body of a badly burned passenger was lying next to him. It was evident he had been attempting to help the passenger to safety.

There was another exit from the Victoria Line platforms, leading to the former King's Cross Midland City (later King's Cross Thameslink) on Pentonville Road. After keeping him in an office for five minutes, police officers decided this was the best way out for Bates. But when they reached the foot tunnel to this exit, they found it was barred by locked gates. These were unlocked reasonably swiftly, but when they reached the other end of the tunnel, there was a further set of gates. These were controlled not by London Underground but by British Rail, and it was not until 2017 that a British Rail cleaner unlocked them.

Bates was then evacuated by ambulance to hospital, where he needed skin grafts on his hands. His face was badly burned, his forehead permanently scarred, and he was unable to write and type - disbaring his from work. "I was extremely angry that the gates were locked," he said in his statement. "I could not believe there was not an effective fire escape."

Meanwhile, eight London Underground staff members and a police officer were trapped by smoke on the Metropolitan Line platforms. At 2005 they were evacuated by train. At 2025, the majority of London Underground staff left via the now-unlocked Pentonville Road exit.

Although most passengers had now been evacuated, the fire was still raging and there were hazards ahead. At 2045 a Northern Line

train, whose driver had not received the order to pass through without stopping, allowed passengers to disembark onto the platform. They were ordered back on board by the police.

At 2111 assistant chief fire officer Kennedy, now in command, gave the order to "make pumps 30". By 2132 there were 14 ambulances on site. At around 2140, two London Underground workers were discovered in a staff mess room, where they had been taking an "extended meal break". Workers were allotted half an hour off, but the inquiry heard that it was "accepted practice" on the late shift to take an hour and a half.

At 0146 on November 19, the fire brigade sent its "stop" message, confirming the fire had been contained. Search and salvage operations continued through the night. The death toll was originally put at 28, but rose to 31.

On February 1 1988, the barrister Desmond Fennell opened the public inquiry into the fire. The inquiry's counsel, Roger Henderson QC, said "the top priority" should be discovering "the immediate cause or causes of the conflagration".

Fennell was advised by a panel of experts throughout the inquiry. Extensive tests and simulations were carried out by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as well as by external experts - using computer simulations and scale models.

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Given that the discarded materials of smokers had caused so many "smouldering" before, there was suspicion from the off that this had been the cause of the fire. Tests concluded that a glowing cigarette was unlikely to have started a blaze. Fennell concluded the ignition was provided by "probably a carelessly discarded lighted match, which fell through the clearance between the steps and the skirting board on the right-hand side" of the escalator.

In the inquiry's reconstruction of the fire's chronology, the match landed on the running track between the escalator's chain and trailer wheels. An "excessive accumulation of readily ignitable grease and detritus" on the track provided the fuel, and the escalator's movement allowed the fire to spread to at least one other location.

In the heat, the wooden balustrades and decking became "more susceptible" to ignition, Fennell concluded. The dry plywood skirting boards were already "impregnated with oil and grease and thus readily ignitable", providing "a path for the fire beneath the escalator to spread to the upper side". When flames emerged between the steps and skirting board, the rubber dressguard, the balustrades, the steps and the risers were ignited.

But there were other theories put forward: that the fire had been ignited by an electrical fault; that it had been caused by friction in the escalator wheel bearings; and that it had been the work of a malicious saboteur.

The inquiry ruled out the first two without much fanfare. And although Fennell also gave arson fairly short shrift, he could not dismiss it out of hand. That's because three witnesses - Tube cleaner Dennis Hills and passengers Illfray Mehmet and Paul Lane - had caught sight of a character they considered suspicious. The 'man in blue overalls' would become ➔

► one of the greatest mysteries of the whole saga.

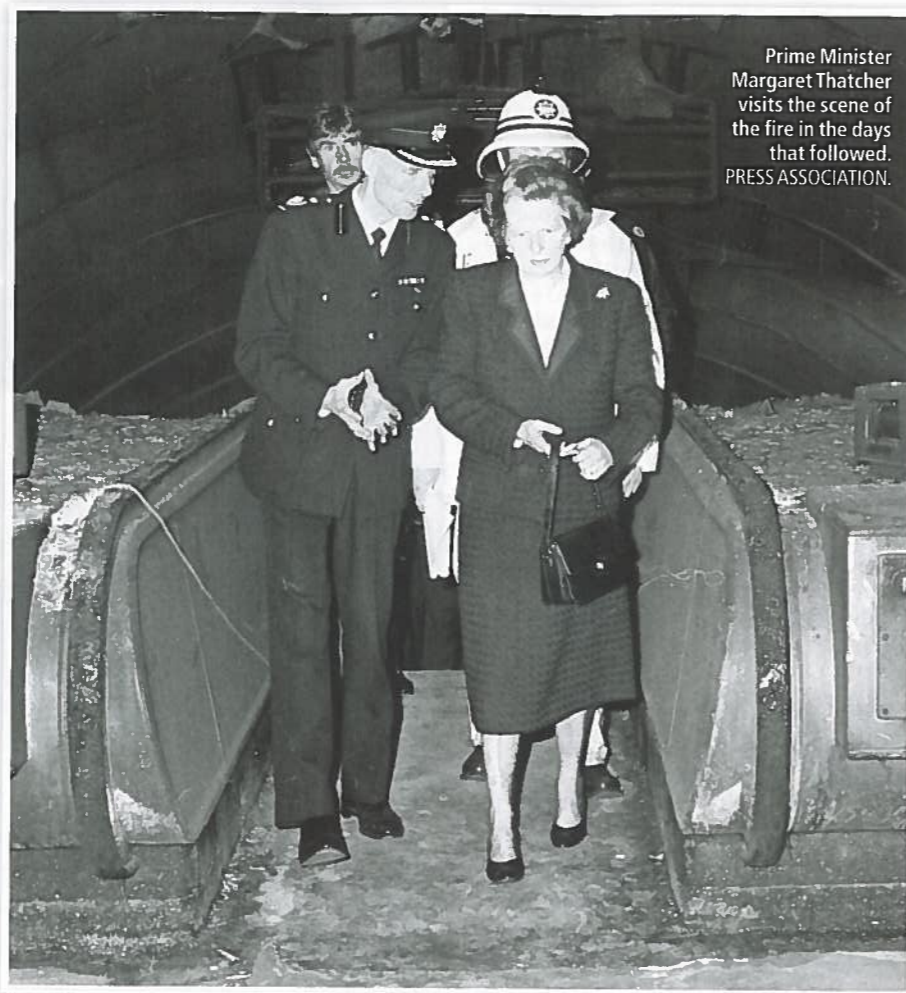
Between 1920 and 1930 the man was reported to have climbed out of a trapdoor leading to the Piccadilly Line escalator machine room. Fennell dismissed the evidence given by the three witnesses, as their accounts were not consistent. He also judged that the views they described were not possible from where they said they were standing.

No one tracked down the man, but the night of the fire was not the last sighting. On December 21 1987, two fitters and their mates were maintaining the old lifts at nearby Angel station. A man in blue overalls appeared at the lattice gates of the lifts, asking them: "Are you going up?" He reappeared on several occasions that day and the day after. When the fitters mentioned him to station staff, they reported being told: "Oh, he's like the resident nut-case, we've had him down here before."

So just who was he? Former *Private Eye* editor Richard Ingrams took a sceptical view of the affair. Writing in *the Guardian* in 2002, he argued that "the story proved a helpful diversion" from accusations of negligence by Tube bosses. Rather chillingly, there were reported sightings of a mysterious figure in blue overalls who would disappear into the tunnel wall at nearby Moorgate station in the mid-1970s.

The main point of contention for experts was the cause of the fire's rapid acceleration in the few minutes immediately before the flashover.

Scientists called as witnesses by London Underground argued that the Proderite paint on the ceiling of the escalator shaft had



Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visits the scene of the fire in the days that followed. PRESS ASSOCIATION.

played a crucial role. Keith Moodie, a principal scientific officer at the HSE, said he could not envisage the fire accelerating and spreading more quickly via the ceiling paint than via the wooden components below.

Among the other factors in play were the 'trench effect' provided by the shape of the escalator, and the increase in air velocity in the escalator shaft as trains entered the station. A computer simulation showed that the trench formed by the escalator's balustrades and steps could have given the fire a highly unusual character - instead of rising vertically to the ceiling and flowing up the apex of the ceiling, the airflow resulting from the fire flowed up the trench (towards the ticket hall).

Two minutes before the flashover, the fire began to lay down in the trench, Fennell concluded. This accounted for the "cleaner burning with less smoke and higher temperatures" that witnesses recalled just before the flashover.

Higher up the trench, the flow separated into two streams. The upper stream caused the flames to ignite the escalator's handrail, decking and fascia board. As the additional smoke and flames engulfed the ceiling paint, they would have caused "a rapid increase in the rate of formation of the smoke".

Meanwhile, the lower stream of the flow stayed down in the trench and continued to accelerate upwards. Fennell said this led to an "extending flame tip" which "ultimately erupted into the Tube lines ticket hall" and

became "a continuous jet of flame". The airflow then took this fireball across the ceiling to the front of the Victoria Line escalators... where passengers had been directed as a means of escape.

Fennell concluded that "the paint on the ceiling of the escalator shaft was not involved in the fire until shortly before the flashover when flames spiralled across the ceiling and ignited it".

If no one had died at King's Cross, then perhaps that would have been investigation enough. But this was a human tragedy, and while the ignition was the product of scientific circumstances, those circumstances themselves were the result of very human failings.

Today's staffing structure of London Underground is unrecognisable from 1987. At the time of the fire, 23 of the 58 staff based at King's Cross were on duty. Eleven of the workforce were deployed on the side of the station serving the deep-level lines, and 12

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Richard Bates, Passenger

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were on the sub-surface side. But aside from the technician and the cleaner, only two workers were below the level of the escalators when the fire was first reported. Indeed, several workers had been restricted to gateline work due to ill health.

Of course, many workers acted heroically - finding innovative ways to evacuate passengers. And as Fennell argued, the operational staff had no adequate training, there was no evacuation plan, there was no supervision, and communication equipment was poor. "In these circumstances, the operating staff had to do the best they could," he said.

And to lay blame at the mess room doors would also be to ignore the failings of London Underground management. The inquiry heard of a worrying culture in the organisation.

"Even at the highest level one director was unlikely to trespass on the territory of another," Fennell wrote in his report. The engineering director would consider fire safety and evacuation procedures as property of the operations director. Only 5% of management jobs were advertised externally.

LU's Tony Ridley acknowledged that at the time of the fire there was a tendency towards "management by memo". Middle managers reported problems, but found that no action was taken. Safety officers told the inquiry they felt like "voices in the wilderness". The Tube's chief fire inspector said he repeatedly found escalator machinery in a bad state of repair.

In 1987, the Tube was also in transition. Its statutory parent company, London Regional Transport (LRT), had been created only three years before when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher abolished Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council (which had previously controlled the Tube and bus networks).

The new body was accountable directly to Whitehall. But under the legislation that created it, LRT was also obliged - in the spirit of the Government's ideology - to invite competitive tenders from private companies for parts of its operation. To pave the way for this, London Underground divided its engineering directorate into "client" and "contractor" groupings - to commission and provide services in the model of a private sector business relationship.

The maintenance of lifts and escalators was a case in point. With the lift and escalator manager's department operated at arm's length from the lift and escalator engineer from 1986, Fennell found that there was confusion about division of responsibilities

Firefighters battled the fire for more than six hours. PRESS ASSOCIATION.

between the so-called contractor and client. And lift and escalator engineer Jeffrey Styles said that after his division was transferred from the operations directorate to the engineering directorate in 1984, informal contact with Tube operating staff had largely ceased.

David Dhanpersaud, the station inspector at King's Cross, had a starker view. "Before the fire at King's Cross, the escalator was actually faulty because the people who were supposedly cleaning them - London Underground got rid of them, like a cutback," he said.

When it established LRT in 1984, the Government had introduced targets to reduce its subsidy. Thus from 1984-85 to 1987-88, London Underground reduced its shortfall between income and expenditure by 24% in real terms.

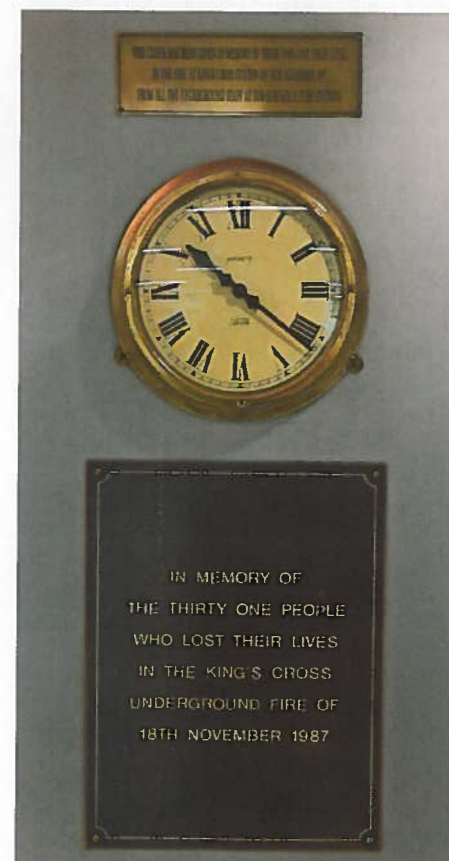
Fennell concluded that there was no

evidence of insufficient money for adequate safety measures. But he did say there was "a feeling among London Underground managers that the financial climate would rule out proposals to increase spending in certain areas". For instance, lift and escalator engineer Styles did not press for escalator safety improvements from the mid-1980s, saying he believed there was little chance they would be approved.

Frank Dobson, the Labour MP for the King's Cross area at the time, said: "It looks as though the interests of safety are being sacrificed from the point of view of trying to save money."

There were also clear failings in the sphere of communications. Fennell found that even staff who were familiar with the equipment in the station "failed to make use of it", while no Underground manager went to meet with the fire crews when they began to arrive.

But after all, the Underground rulebook explicitly distinguished between "two types of fire" - making it clear that employees could deal with the first (less serious) kind themselves. After the blaze at Oxford Circus in 1984, the London Fire Brigade wrote to London Underground expressing "grave concern" at this policy. "Experience has shown that a two-stage procedure leads to confusion and, consequently, a delay in attendance of the Brigade," the letter said. But the



A memorial clock and plaque have been erected close to the scene of the fire. PAUL BIGLAND.

➔ Underground did not change its policy - with fatal consequences.

Well before his report was published, Fennell's probe was ruffling feathers at the heart of Margaret Thatcher's government. These shenanigans have not, until now, been in the public domain - but the last tranche of documents declassified at the National Archives included the Cabinet Office's file on the fire.

Much of this bundle focuses on how the Government managed the departures of the two biggest heads to roll after the fire - London Underground chief Tony Ridley and LRT chairman Sir Keith Bright.

Ridley had accepted during the inquiry that London Underground "may not have given as high a priority to passenger safety in stations as it should have done". Bright's LRT had statutory responsibility - and Fennell

“When it comes to safety standards, the emphasis on training and prevention as well as liaison with the emergency services, London Underground is simply a different place in 2017 to what it was in 1987.”

Mark Wild, Managing Director, London Underground

concluded that Bright had been mistaken in not believing he had responsibility to oversee Tube safety issues in the same way he oversaw Tube productivity and budgeting.

Appearing at the inquiry in June 1988, Bright said that he had offered to resign after the inquiry "as a matter of honour", but that his resignation had been turned down by Transport Secretary Paul Channon.

After this was reported in the *Evening Standard*, Thatcher received a memo from her

private secretary Andy Bearpark, stating that Channon's office had said Bright was "not being entirely open in his remarks".

Instead (Channon's office had briefed), Bright had "several weeks after the disaster, when the *Evening Standard* ran a short campaign calling for his resignation... sent an envelope to the [Channon] containing a letter dated several weeks earlier containing his resignation". He thus felt unable to accept, the memo says, and were the situation different he would have consulted Thatcher before taking a decision on whether to accept the resignation or not.

This account is strongly disputed by a source close to Bright, who said that the LRT chairman had drafted the letter before offering his resignation during a phone call with Channon. When the inquiry was established, Bright then sent on the letter to place his offer on the record, the source said.

Channon may well have been briefing to protect his own position - the inquiry had the potential to be very damaging to the Government, which had fought a pitched political battle with the GLC for control of London's public assets just a few years previous.

Ahead of the publication of the Fennell report, Thatcher's private secretary Paul Gray's attention was drawn to an "accumulation of throw-away comments and anecdotes" that would be damaging for London Underground. Thatcher was then forwarded a minute from Channon concluding, in Gray's words, that both Ridley and Bright would "have to go", and that he should seek to "secure their removal before his statement [to Parliament], at minimum cost in terms of compensation".

Bright and Ridley resigned when the report was published in November 1988. In July 1989, Channon's successor Cecil Parkinson informed Thatcher that Bright's solicitors had issued a claim for £210,000 in gross compensation. The Attorney General had advised that £46,667 should be the Government's final offer, and that "it would be for Sir Keith to sue if he wanted more".

In fairness, this was not Bright's only action on issues of compensation. Ridley has said that it was at the LRT chairman's insistence - against the advice of company lawyers - that London Underground offered compensation to the victims from the off.

However, many survivors, and the families of those who had died, felt the offers were insulting and insufficient. Sophie Tarrasenko, whose 25-year-old brother Ivan died in the fire, told the BBC: "The way London Underground were to us, mainly through their lawyers, was pretty shoddy on the whole. Every penny was fought for."

An Early Day Motion tabled in Parliament condemned the "crude, careless indifference"

of London Regional Transport towards another victim, American musician Ron Lipsius, who fought in the courts for eight years after his burns left him unable to play the guitar. It described the resistance to paying compensation as "legalised barbarity" which culminated in "a kind of black auction whose sole purpose was to limit London Transport's liability".

To the anger of many victims, no senior transport officials were prosecuted. Andrew Dismore, who represented train drivers' union ASLEF and the Fire Brigades Union at the inquiry as a solicitor, recalls that the laws left little room for this. But when he was elected an MP in 1997, Dismore took up the campaign for stronger laws - eventually introducing new legislation to the statute book.

"[In 1987] you'd have to show a direct chain, and you don't have to do that now for corporate manslaughter," he says.

The courts were not the only arena for the anger of victims and their families. Ivan Tarrasenko had played drums with the Mad Max-inspired performance art group Mutoid Waste Company, which squatted a derelict bus garage near King's Cross station in the 1980s. A year after his death in the fire, Tarrasenko's friends organised a unique commemoration of the tragedy.

"We decided as a tribute to Ivan we'd do a massive 'drum in,'" recalls Matthew Moffat. "It was pre-mobile phones, so we all got together through phoning round, [putting up] posters and word of mouth. We said everyone and anyone who wanted to get involved should turn up on the first anniversary."

"We arrived at six o'clock in the evening, and people just started drumming. People turned up with their shakers, their military marching drums."

Moffat recalls that Jerry Williams, the mayor of Camden, was present and that "everyone shut up for a minute's silence", but otherwise it was "probably 500 people making a hell of a racket".

He adds: "There was a total anger because... everyone was thinking it would be swept under the carpet." When eventually the



The main ticket hall at King's Cross St Pancras today is barely recognisable from November 1987, as a result of significant remodelling. However, the site of the escalators to the Piccadilly Line and gateline that were engulfed in fire remain in the same place to the left, while the ticket office was located where a bank of ticket machines can be seen to the right. PAUL BIGLAND.

police moved the crowd on, the drumming continued for 12 hours back at the MWC's base on nearby Battle Bridge Road.

But although many remained understandably angry, the disaster was not swept under the carpet. In the decade following, safety standards on London Underground were transformed.

"To mention just a few important changes: smoking has been banned across the network, stations have been upgraded to higher safety standards and made more fire-resistant, and before a station can be reopened following a fire alert the London Fire Brigade must give the all clear," says the Tube's current managing director Mark Wild.

"When it comes to safety standards, the emphasis on training and prevention as well as liaison with the emergency services, London Underground is simply a different place in 2017 to what it was in 1987."

Wild also emphasises the importance of taking "the time to remember those who lost their lives in this terrible event and the impact it had on their families, loved ones and friends".

But not everyone is satisfied enough

has been done. Rail union RMT's General Secretary Mick Cash has warned of the need to remain "ever vigilant against the cuts to staffing and weaker safety regulation, which place our members as well as passengers at an unacceptable risk".

Dismore, now a member of the London Assembly, says the fire was "game changing in a number of respects" - including in getting better equipment and protective clothing for firefighters, and a recognition of the post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by emergency service workers. But while it resulted in a "much tougher safety regime", he says that "what's happened since is that a lot of that regulation has fallen by the wayside".

John Hendy QC, who represented the Association of London Authorities at the inquiry, says that compared with other public probes, Fennell's was successful in getting to the truth and preventing future tragedies. "Anyone going on the Underground now could see it's made a difference," he said.

Hendy also acted at the inquests into the fire at Lakanel House in south London, where six people died in 2009. The coroner called on the Government to review its guidance on building regulations and assess whether external tower block refurbishments "might reduce existing fire protection".

This warning has become chilling in the wake of the fire at Grenfell Tower this summer, where the external cladding spread the blaze across the building. For Hendy, this is yet another tragedy of King's Cross.

"[Fennell's inquiry shows] these things can be done effectively and make a big difference," he sighs. "Why the hell didn't Lakanel House make a difference?"

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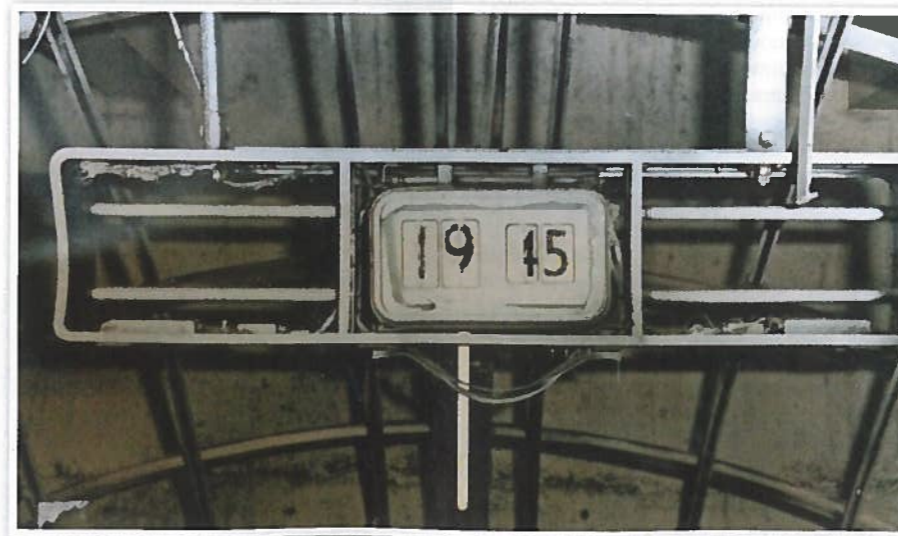
Conrad Landin is the *Morning Star's* industrial correspondent, and also writes about transport, education and politics for a range of newspapers and magazines. Twitter: @conradlandin



The Piccadilly Line escalator shaft today shows no sign of the tragedy that occurred there three decades ago. PAUL BIGLAND.



The view looking up the same shaft in November 1987 showing burn patterns. LONDON FIRE BRIGADE.



The clock above the Piccadilly Line escalators was stopped at 1945 due to the intense heat of the fire raging beneath it. LONDON FIRE BRIGADE.