

Harlesden Public Clock. A Clock in Time. Part 2

From early in the 20th century proposals to bring the electric tram service to Harlesden and Willesden were being put forward to include routes from the Coach and Horses at Stonebridge and along the Harrow Road; and also from Cricklewood Broadway, via Willesden Green Station, and Church Road, and of course, to stop at the Jubilee Clock. The Middlesex County Council was responsible for roads and provided plans for the use of roads to accommodate the "light railway", as it was sometimes referred.

1889. By now there was in existence a route from Paddington to the Royal Oak, a horse-drawn tram service.

Total projected cost £40,937.

1902. MCC finally has application for Cricklewood to Craven Park tramway approved.

October 1904. MCC propose Harlesden to Stonebridge Park lines. Building delayed due to flooding of River Brent.

November 1906. Contracts placed for Willesden Green to Craven Park tramway. Cost £25,000.

February 1907. Contracts placed for Willesden Junction to Acton tramway.

June 1908. Willesden Green to Willesden Junction Station service opens.



Early photograph of trams passing the Jubilee Clock (courtesy Leroy Simpson)

July 1908. The Olympics of 1908 should have been staged in Rome, but in 1906 a major eruption of Mount Vesuvius caused serious damage and loss of life. The Government of Italy decided that their resources would be better spent on disaster relief, and London had offered the use of the White City Stadium (constructed for the Franco-British Exhibition) to stage the Games.

The marathon race course was mapped across a course that included quite a lot of what is now London Borough of Brent.

1891. The Harrow Road & Paddington Tramways Company applied for powers to extend the line from the Royal Oak, through Manor Park Road, to re-join the Harrow Road at Craven Park. Objections from the Local Board meant that this extension did not happen.

1899-1900. Willesden Urban District Council finally propose a tramway to run from the south of Kilburn via Willesden Lane, through High Road, Willesden, Church Road, Craven Park, High Street, Harlesden, to terminate at Tubbs Road.



1908 London Olympics. Durando of Italy passes the Clock in the marathon race, on his way to the White City Stadium

The course was to pass the Jubilee Clock, and it is reported that "there was hardly standing room anywhere" along the Harlesden part of the route. A local firm of photographers, Robinson and Bruder, took pictures of the principal runners Hayes and Durando, and sold postcards of the scenes to local people.

January 1910. The trams are running regularly, but an accident is reported, where two tram cars collide, rounding the corner at Acton Lane, and both are damaged.

March 1913. Again, two tram cars collide near to the clock

April 1913. The death is reported of Mr. Dell senior. It was the Dell jewellers and clockmakers on the High Street that had undertaken to look after various aspects of the maintenance of the clock, since 1888.

January 1914. The death of Mr Goldney-Carey, one of the original members of the Committee responsible for the installation of the clock is announced. It was his young daughter who performed the public unveiling ceremony in 1888.

During the years of the Great War, there is no mention of the Clock in the local press.

April 1921. There is a suggestion that it is time the clock is removed. This sees a reaction from local tradesmen and residents, and a petition is generated for its salvation. The problem that is cited is one of traffic access. Local officials do not help the cause of the clock by removing its hands. By the end of the month the petition has raised over 3,000 signatures to keep the clock. It is accepted that it does not keep good time.

July 1921. The clock still has no hands. The Borough engineer is pressed to get estimates for the repair of the clock, but the Works and Open Space Committee suggests that the residents who signed the petition should foot the bill.

March 1922. Some Councillors, still delaying on the repair and cleaning of the clock, are claiming that they are waiting to see what proposals the Middlesex County Council are putting forward for widening the road junction where the clock now stands, before committing to undertake restorative works.

July 1922. Considerable repairs are identified as necessary to the wood paving on the tramways in front of the clock tower.

August 1922. Councillor Gregory reports that a

I hear that already upwards of 3,000 signatures have been affixed to the petition to Willesden Council against the proposal to remove the Harlesden Jubilee Clock. The organisers are, apparently, meeting with no trader or resident who is actually in favour of its removal; but a few people point out that, as the clock never keeps time and has had its hands in cold storage for months, it might as well be useless anywhere else as at "The Jubilee Clock."

The suggestion that the Clock should be removed stirs fierce opposition among local people.
Willesden Chronicle 22nd April 1922

friend would be willing, at his own expense, to repair or replace the clock. Councillor Cameron questions the Council on its responsibility for such works. He suggests that the Council should take the responsibility. Councillor Hill suggests that the clock should be removed, as its position makes it "impossible" for traffic.



The Clock is shown carrying direction signs, for local areas, and in 1924, for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. (Brent Archive)

January 1923. Assurances are given that the clock will be restored to working order. Messrs. Dell confirms that such a restoration would be easily achieved and are “rapidly completing the necessary repairs”.

March 1923. Dells guarantee their repair for five years. It seems that Councillor Gregory may well have underwritten the costs of the repairs.

March-November 1924. The Council is engaged in negotiations with Middlesex County Council concerning the widening of the road at the Jubilee Clock.

Summer 1925. The British Empire Exhibition. The clock is pictured carrying (for the first time?) directions signs, one of which points the way to the exhibition.

May 1926. General Strike. A motor car from Watford collides with the clock, without causing any major damage.

Late 1927. The road at the Acton Lane corner of the Clock junction is widened and a double track is laid as a result.

March 1928. The Clock is not working, and again the hands have been removed.

June- December 1928. Repairs to the clock are “in hand”

THE JUBILEE CLOCK.
The Standard Time Co., Ltd., wrote with regard to the delay in the synchronization of the Jubilee Clock.
-In reply to a question, the ENGINEER said that three or four weeks ago, the contractors informed him that the Jubilee Clock would be completed in a fortnight.
Councillor A. SMITH: Oh, it will be ready for the King's Jubilee. (Laughter).

Once again the Clock is about to be restored to full health. Willesden Chronicle, 25th January 1929

Sometime in the late 1920s the street lighting in Harlesden is electrified, and possibly at the same time the original lanterns of the clock are replaced.

January 1929. The Standard Time Co. Ltd. is concerned in the “synchronisation of the Jubilee Clock”. Does this mean that the clock itself is now electrified?

January 1938. The affairs of the clock are transferred from the Works and Open Spaces Committee, to the Electricity Committee of the Local Board.

January 1938. It is the year of the Golden Jubilee of the Jubilee Clock. In August the clock is removed. This is apparently without warning. No notices seem to have been posted.

October 1938. The Clock is replaced, moved slightly further North, in the direction of Wembley, something less than 20 yards. More significantly, the lanterns and the curved arms that held them, have been removed, as well as the weather vane. Even at this point some doubters were calling for the clock to be removed for good, although the Deputy Mayor was firm in declaring that the clock served as a landmark.

Possibly as a result of the clock being removed without any fuss or announcement, while it was missing from its place, various rumours were circulating, most of them humorous references to the various campaigns to get rid of the clock. The most apposite suggestion was from a so-called “special correspondent”, who saw the removal of the clock as a possible addition to the re-armament effort that was focussed on the coming War. (see below)



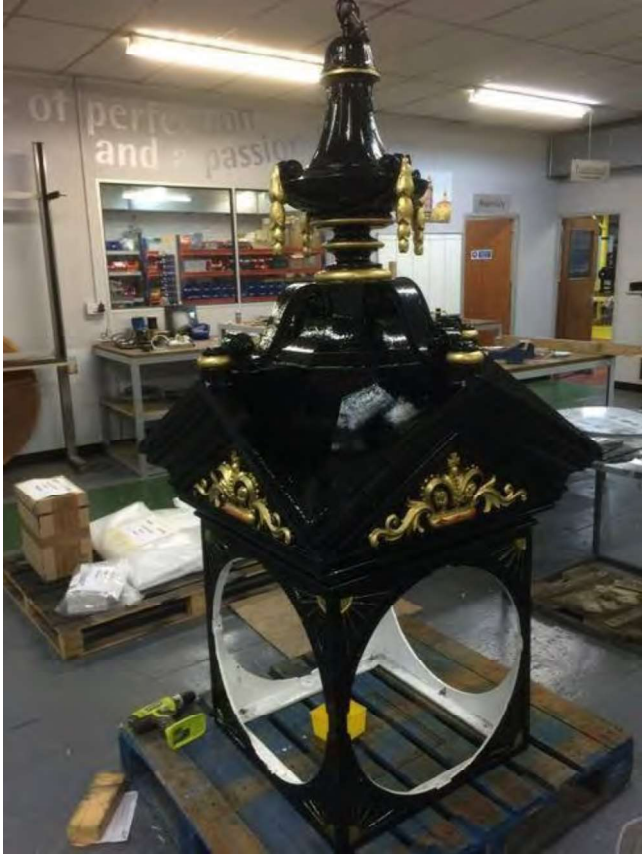
A humorous interpretation of the reason for the removal of the clock, in view of the looming European War. Willesden Chronicle, 19th August 1938

January 1957. On the eve of the 70th birthday of the clock, the Willesden Chronicle runs a lengthy feature on the clock (including some inaccuracies). Another article from the time wishes the clock “a new coat of paint”.

April 1983. A group of local tradesmen form the Harlesden Centre Group raise money through a fun run and various competitions to re-paint the Clock. Other achievements, in conjunction with Brent Council, result in new bins, a new map-guide for the area, and new links with local schools. An initiative to have the clock refuge pedestrianized fails to raise the interest of central

Government. The Centre Group itself falters when Marks and Spencer closes its Harlesden store in September 1986. The manager was one of the prime movers of the Group.

January 1997. Harlesden City Challenge comes to the fore, as a new initiative to revitalise parts of the area. The clock has another coat of paint.



Part of the 2010-15 project was to fully restore the clock. This involved dismantling. Here are some of the components of the clock in the Smith's workshop at York. (Courtesy of Leroy Simpson)



The Clock, fully restored, pictured in 2015.
(Courtesy Leroy Simpson)

2010- 2015. Harlesden City Challenge again is involved in the restoration of the clock. On this occasion, a rather more thorough job is proposed. The Clock is removed under the control of Smiths of Derby. The body of the structure is sent to York, where it is dismantled and completely refurbished. The process reveals that the original colour scheme was black and gold and red markings. The decision is made to restore the Clock to, as near as possible, the appearance of the original (although no colour photographs exist of that original). Additionally, the replacement of the Clock involves moving its position significantly to a restructured refuge, that is now part of the pavement, on the East side of the High Street.

Who knows what the future of Harlesden Jubilee Clock will hold, but hopefully it will always stand as a landmark and a symbol of the area.

By Harry Brown

If you know any more about the clock, or have abiding memories, or interesting stories, please do get in touch with the Society and pass on your information.