

What's going on

The London Underground is proving as loved by film-makers as it is reviled by those of us who have to use it every day. We look at the making of *Tube Tales* and other celluloid stories, and at the life-improving projects that may or may not make it

Aldwych — the new Hollywood?

Tubes, cables, pipes: as with any organism, many of London's vital processes take place below the skin. Much of what goes on down there goes unnoticed except for the odd mysterious rumbling, but after hours, even long-closed "ghost" tube stations are anything but dead space. Film-making, parties, art shows—plenty of unusual activities keep the tube awake, even though Londoners can't get a train much after midnight.

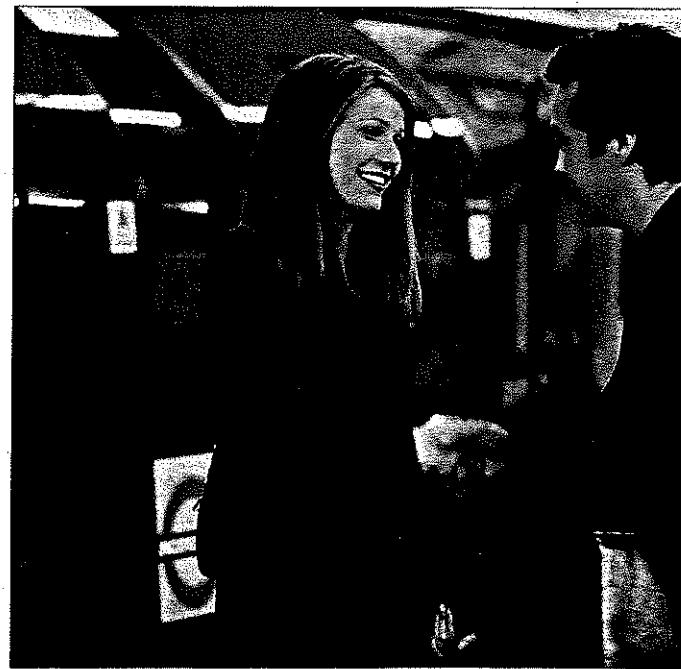
Filming in, and on, the tube has kept Kate Blow, London Transport's film co-ordinator, plenty busy in the past few years: everything from a Prodigy video to episodes of *Coronation Street* and *McCallum*, to Neil Gaiman's epic *Neverwhere* to *Nil By Mouth*, *B. Monkey* and *Sliding Doors*. Coming soon to a platform near you are *Elephant Juice* (with Daniela Nardini, and written by *This Life*'s creator Amy Jenkins); *This Year's Love*—this year's big film (maybe); and in post-production,

The Last Yellow and *Virtual Sexuality*.

Aldwych is a particularly popular disused station with film crews because, says Joe Burke, a former group station manager on the Central Line, "it's got a large lift for hoisting equipment down to platform level. But as it's only half a mile to Holborn, we have to ensure nothing we do interrupts the real railway." Aldwych has been (in London Underground's phraseology) "surplus to operational requirements" since Friday September 30, 1994 (an extra train had to be laid on to accommodate those who had come to travel on the Aldwych link just one last time).

One platform at Aldwych operated only from 1907 to 1908 and has been used for everything from storing National Gallery treasures during World War I to testing architectural features and finishes, some of which are now visible on the Victoria and Jubilee lines. Aldwych is also used for emergency training and by the fire brigade and British Transport Police.

The Brit Pack has been scuttling



down there?

around the tunnels recently: Ewan McGregor, Jude Law, Daniela Nardini (again), Dexter Fletcher, Jason Flemyng and Denise van Outen, among others, have just completed shooting Sky Pictures' *Tube Tales*, a collection of vignettes based on the real lives of tube passengers and due for release in autumn. As well as Aldwych, shooting took place at Mornington Crescent, Bank, Temple and Hampstead during weekend closures.

It's not just films: you can hire Aldwych booking hall for functions. Joe Burke says, "We make as much money as we can on anything we can safely put on, birthday parties, functions for up to 350 people, anything except a nightclub." Why not a nightclub? "Not enough emergency exits."

Two weeks ago Artangel staged John Berger and Simon McBurney's art show *The Vertical Line* 15 metres down in the bowels of the disused station — very fitting since the show was inspired by Stone Age cave paintings found deep inside a system of caves in France.

Which one looks more familiar to you? Northern Line grime in *Nil By Mouth* (far left) or the sleek new rolling stock of The Drain — the Bank to Waterloo line — in *Sliding Doors* (left). In *Tube Tales*, a red-wigged Denise van Outen (right) plays Alex, a tube-user who turns the tables on the suit who keeps harassing her underground; shooting took place at Aldwych

The other disused station often used for filming is Down Street (*right*), the Piccadilly line station abandoned on 21 May 1932. It lies between Green Park and Hyde Park Corner (experts know how many seconds to count before its brick walls can be fleetingly spotted). It has a reinforced concrete roof and was the only place in London Churchill felt safe. During the war, the Railway Executive Committee met here, and you can still see what looks like flock wallpaper through a layer of battleship-grey paint, and trace the route taken by the lady with the tea trolley every day.

Sadly, most of the original fittings have been removed; though the kitchen, conference room and 12-bed "executive dormitory" are long and narrow with curved walls — pretty much what you would expect of a London Underground des res. *Lizzie Bailey*

The London Transport Museum runs regular tours of Down Street; call 0171-565 7299 for dates and application form.



Ghost stations

This train will not be stopping at:

**Down Street
(Piccadilly)**

Tower of London (Metropolitan)

**British Museum
(Central)**

Post Office (Central)

**Bull & Bush
(Northern)**

Lord's (Metropolitan)

you shift a filing cabinet and wrench open a door, you find yourself on a long-disused station platform, complete with faded posters and pre-war cobwebs. **space** cannot confirm this, but we do hope it's true.



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