



Design of the time: The symbol of London's public transport is more than 100 years old

The evolution of the TfL roundel

EXPLORE LONDON'S RICH TRANSPORT HISTORY FROM THE 1900s TO TODAY

THIS iconic piece of branding – a circle with a horizontal bar through its centre – started its design journey in 1908 at what is now known as St James's Park Tube station.

Here, the platform walls had become so littered with posters and adverts that a distinctive name board was needed so passengers on the train could work out which stop they were at. Originally known as the bar and circle, it comprised a red, glassy enamel disc with a blue horizontal bar.

By 1912, the new logo was being used on map covers, station exteriors, posters and other publicity. The artists creating these items weren't given any guidelines as to the sizing or precise shades of red and blue to use, so their designs weren't uniform.

Also in 1912, the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC) became part of the Underground Group and so a new symbol combining the LGOC's winged wheel logo and the bar and disc was created to form the basis of the roundel trademark as we now know it.

The following year, the Underground's publicity manager Frank Pick commissioned typographer Edward Johnston to design a company typeface for use

across all its published materials, strengthening its branding and making it instantly recognisable.

The new typeface was registered as a trademark in 1917 and used on the bar and circle. Between 1920 and 1933, Johnston designed several different versions of the symbol for the divisions of the Underground Group in an attempt to create a unified identity for both rail and road services.

BUILDING BRANDING

The 1920s and 1930s are now considered a golden age for design on London's transport network, not least because Frank Pick recruited the architect Charles Holden to design new Underground stations and reconstruct existing ones.

Holden incorporated the logo into the very fabric of station interiors, including platform furniture and on bus stop flags and shelters. London Transport was one of the first companies to realise the value of its branding and in 1938 it published a 'Standard Signs Manual' to manage the usage of the roundel.

After the war, more minimal designs became popular (as they were cheaper to make and maintain, and used fewer materials) and so the roundel was simplified.



All change: Examples of the roundel over the decades

During the 1970s, the roundel started to appear on the sides of buses, and a plain colour version – with no text – was introduced on Underground trains. In 1972, the roundel was officially named as the corporate symbol of London Transport. As a result, the Design Research Unit was employed to review the design and use of logo and typeface.

Design consultants Henrion, Ludlow and Schmidt were commissioned to create a new blue and red Underground roundel, which was not unlike the Design Research Unit symbol of 1972. When TfL was created in 2000 to take control of all public transport services across the capital, it decided to keep the roundel as its trademark. Today, the symbol is well loved by Londoners and considered as iconic as London's black taxis and Britain's red telephone boxes.

KEEN TO LEARN MORE?

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Iconic: The roundel is one of the most recognised logos in the world

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