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Contours of Time: archival revelations + spatial representation

Clare Hamman

On March 15 1899, the first passenger train departed London's Marylebone Station for the city of Manchester. Sitting within a complex of communities – historic and contemporary, transient and permanent – Marylebone Station has always been as much, if not more, about the people who created, used, worked within, and lived near to it. Through its enduring presence, it has become a landmark offering a generous, but familiar, gateway into London for the wider railway network.

As part of celebrations to mark the station's 125th anniversary, an installation was designed and created for one entrance. This article explores the process and execution of research and design that were key to this commission. It considers how the consultation and disclosure of archival material can be revealed through the design, display and spatial arrangement of material; how the patina of the past is carried within the interior of

a space and resonates with the present; and how the particular historic and contemporary connections that exist between Marylebone Station and the wider communities it serves might be reflected within the design's composition.



KEYWORDS: archive; Marylebone Station; narrative; cartographics; spatial representation; design

Separated from the arterial road leading traffic west from the City of London to Heathrow Airport and beyond, Marylebone Station – the last mainline train terminal to be built in London – seems poised; a portal to another place and time. The merciless competition during the nineteenth century between rival railway companies determined to reach the “center” of London resulted in a necklace of stations, all restrained from their ultimate goal by what was known as the “new road” (Green 2021, 10) – still a major thoroughfare running east to west on the northern edge of the heart of London. Marylebone Station is sandwiched in the midst of this collective. Its diminutive stature lacks the frenetic energy of its near neighbors Paddington and Euston Stations, or the futuristic gleam of glass and steel which engulf Kings Cross and St Pancras Stations (Figure 1).

The enduring presence of Marylebone Station over the last 125 years belies the continuous threats it has weathered to its existence. When the first passenger train departed for Manchester on March 15 1899 (Heather 2018, 147), it marked more than the success of the Great Central Railway to link its rail network in the north of England with London; it symbolized the end of an era. As the Act of Parliament was passed granting the rail company permission to extend its route (Hobson & Wragge 1901, 84),¹ the first British motor car was being constructed (Nicholson 1982, 337),² inscribing the transition from mass to personal transportation.

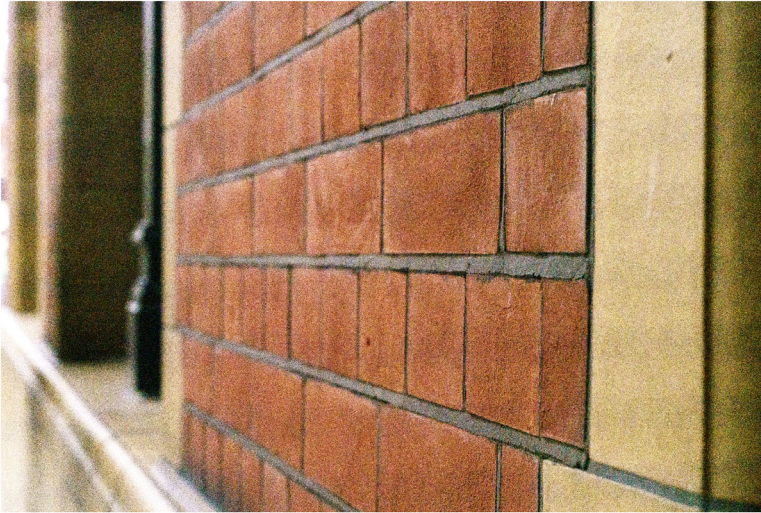


Figure 1

Detail of Marylebone Station's Familiar Materiality.

Credit: Photo: Clare Hamman

To commemorate the 125th anniversary of Marylebone Station, I was commissioned to design an installation for the station that responded to its particular historic and contemporary conditions. The significant effect the arrival of the railways had on London's social and economic landscape (Green 2021, 9) is epitomized by Marylebone Station: the construction of the station and trainline destroyed homes and fractured the communities which lived in the new railway's path; but its presence also offered employment to many, and opened horizons of possibility through the rapid connection it provided between cities. How might an installation present this historic context and embody the contemporary connections between the station and the communities of people it continues to serve? Could it emphasize the political and social nuances of Marylebone Station, framing the lines of fracture that form the contours of history?

Unravelling the past

Standing in a boardroom in central London, I'm surrounded by artifacts. In spite of bomb damage from the Second World War, The Portman Estate's archive still retains many items detailing the history of this central London landowner: photographs and personal effects of its aristocratic family members; ledgers detailing the annual property rent due and from whom; and iterations of maps – some carefully and professionally bound, others rolled and enfolded within each other, their frayed edges and dust-inlaid surfaces conveying other layers of history; palimpsests to the past (Figure 2a–c).

This social narrative, buried within the contours of archival material, turns an object into an artifact. Where an object carries “the



Figure 2

Unfurling and Unfolding.

(a–c) Samples of maps from The Portman Estate archive which act as a legal record, detailing Viscount Portman's London estate.

The rolls of maps catalogue the negotiations between the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway to purchase land for the future station, hotel, and coal yard.

Credit: By kind permission of the trustees of The Portman Estate.

refs: (a, b) P/E 1/11/20 & (c) P/E 1/11/23 // Photos: Clare Hamman



Figure 3

Archival Exploration.

The bound map of 1876 describes every revenue generating freehold property within The Portman Estate. The land agreed to be sold to the railway company in 1896 is annotated and shaded.

Credit: By kind permission of the trustees of The Portman Estate.

ref: P/E 1/11/23 // Photo: Clare Hamman

stigmata of human action” (Chazan 2019, 2), the action of retaining and preserving the item in an archive or collection elevates it, marking it as something revered. The information inscribed within it, the reason for its creation, accrued annotations and marginalia, and the motivation for its safe keeping all collude to provide a deeper understanding – physically, socially and emotionally – of the artifact. Enriched by the lexicons of other disciplines and eras, it becomes a symbol of historic understanding as it “accumulate[s] meanings as time passes” (Pearce 1994, 19). This reframing creates a threshold from which to consider the past from the perspective of today.

The Portman Estate’s 1876 bound map provides a visceral impression of the future station’s presence (Figure 3). Large blue shapes float across its surface, defining the sites of the future station, hotel and coal yard. Annotated “GCR” and “1896”, they inscribe into the landowner’s legacy the date it sold swathes of land to the Great Central Railway. Superimposed over scores of pink-colored houses, the shapes visually convey how the station’s arrival obliterated the



Figure 4

Detail of Marylebone Station Historic Panel Installation.

Studying photographs from the 1890s, characters begin to materialize: the policeman standing near the street corner; children playing on the road, their parents watching from the front door. The Georgian properties of Harewood Square and neighboring streets were demolished to make way for Marylebone Station. In compensation, the railway company built Wharncliffe Gardens, six tenement blocks for lower-working class families. Wharncliffe Gardens was in turn demolished in the 1960s by the Greater London Council and replaced by the Lisson Green Estate (Green 2021, 58), bringing a broader story of London's rapid development and continuous evolution into focus.

Credit: (panel design): Chasing Shadows // Photo: Clare Hamman

revenue-generating properties which occupied the same land. This overlapping serves to emphasize the financial cost, but more poignantly it confirms the social cost of the railway's arrival to the area; the destruction of a nascent community and forced relocation of residents of all social classes.

The social make-up of properties and their residents in Marylebone has always been a combination of the very wealthy and an itinerant working class. The area's exponential development during the nineteenth century is clarified by the archive material retained by The Portman Estate. Successions of maps produced for Viscount Portman from 1833 onwards show the initial demarcation of future neighborhood blocks and roads, and the sequential construction of houses and apartment blocks as developers built on the former fields and market gardens (Figure 4).

My journey through the archives became marked by these phantom presences of people who touched Marylebone Station (Figure 5). What happened to those who were displaced by the station's arrival? Whose hands helped to construct the tunnels that carried the railway tracks and built the walls of the station? Who were the commuters and train guards whose footsteps echo in the photographs of Marylebone?



Figure 5

Development, Context and People.

A panel from the Marylebone Station 125th anniversary installation. The juxtaposition of historic images, information and the narrative structure are bound by the frame. The subtle graphic design draws attention to particular fragments of the archival material, creating another layer of narrative and understanding. Passing beyond the edge of the frame, the shapes and colors suggest connections between the panels and through chronology. The contemporary street life of Harewood Avenue is caught in the reflection of the overhanging brass light. Credit: (panel design): Chasing Shadows // Photo: Clare Hamman

The relative youth of Marylebone enriched the variety of archive sources and resources that could be consulted and considered to understand the social and physical landscape of the station: national newspaper headlines from the 1980s screamed of the threatened closure of Marylebone Station; footage from the 1960s showed The Beatles filming *Hard Day's Night* (1964) on and around the station's platforms and concourse; signed contracts from 1899 detailed the omnibus companies and shoe-shiners permitted to trade at the station; photographs from the 1890s, 1920s and 1950s taken by amateur and professional photographers captured the people who created, maintained and used the station. Drawing from this breadth

of material, I distilled a narrative about the station's creation and existence. Bound within the panel frames, these temporally distant moments and people's experiences resonate with one another to form a tapestry, the close proximity of the historical fragments forming a community, a conversation about Marylebone Station echoing through the decades.

Mapping the present

While the historic panels collapse temporal events, the graphic installation collapses the spatial connections to Marylebone Station. Designed in collaboration with research-design studio Climate Cartographics, the multiple layers of the geospatial representation resonate with the complex of topographical, community and cultural networks linked to the contemporary Marylebone Station (Figure 6).

The landscape of southern England undulates across the textile's printed surface. The intensity of contour lines, water ways and urban form inscribes the succession of features the train route passes between London Marylebone and Birmingham – the terminal station of the train route today. The vivid red line impresses the physical exertion made by the navies³ a century earlier as they cut the path of the railway track through the landscape of the Chiltern Hills. Zooming in to a larger scale, the built physical form and streets of



Figure 6

Marylebone Station's 125th Anniversary Installation.

Marylebone Station's Grade 2 listing informed and shaped the nature of the design intervention. The color palette and design of the historic panels complement the existing decor of the space, while their spatial arrangement is reminiscent of train timetable displays. The graphic map installation hangs perpendicular to these, the prominently featured line of the railway mirroring the orientation of the train platforms beyond.

Credit: (graphic map) Climate Cartographics // (panel design): Chasing Shadows // Photo: Clare Hamman

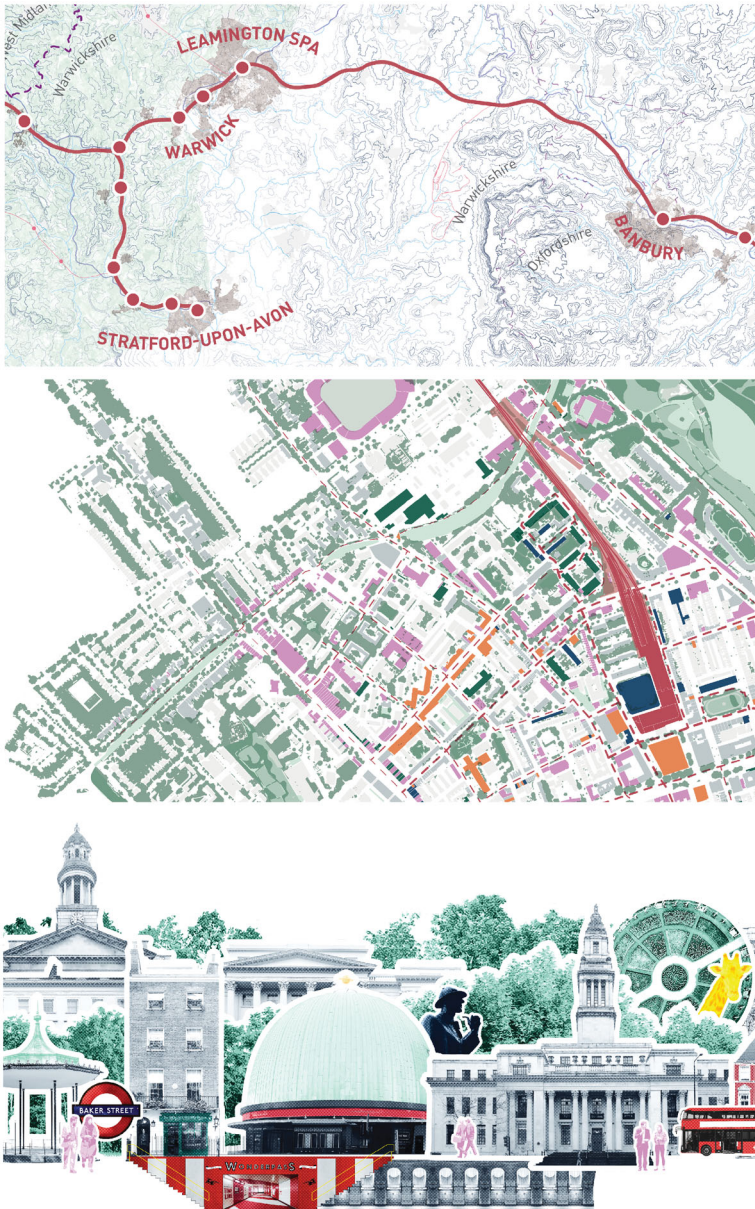


Figure 7

Details from Multi-layered Narrative Map.

The separate layers of the graphic map detail connections to Marylebone Station, visually communicating and celebrating the value of this line to communities, commerce and architecture. The base geospatial map captures the topography the current train line slices through, the route it follows, and the stops between the terminals, reflecting the role rail infrastructure played in the development of this region. The central, local layer highlights Marylebone Station's connections to its immediate surroundings. While the cultural vitality of the communities surrounding the station animate the foreground.

Credit: Climate Cartographics

Marylebone Station's immediate surroundings are superimposed over the topological representation. The intensity of the station's presence is viscerally shown, its connection to the national scale amplified as the rail lines intersect and fuse with the underlying map, bleeding out across the wider landscape (Figure 7a-c).

Occupying the foreground, the social vitality surrounding the station bustles along the bottom of the graphic print. Local landmarks like Church Street Market, retail institutions like Daunt Books on Marylebone High Street, and recognizable icons like Sherlock Holmes, the fictional detective who famously resided on nearby Baker Street, jostle for space. This overlapping panorama acknowledges the implicit complexity of the railway's history, and the contemporary multitudes of communities which activate Marylebone Station – residents, commuters and tourists – those who work in, live near to, and pass through the station on a daily basis.

Where the historic panels humanize the past by drawing attention to the impact the station had on certain individuals, the map acts as a kaleidoscope through which the viewer can define their own personal narrative, making tangible Marylebone Station's geographical reach and extent. Standing within the station and studying the award-winning map,⁴ the features one sees, and seeks, within the graphic – how the folds of contours locate one's home, the community aspects that jump out – tie a person to the contemporary Marylebone Station. The bisecting lines form new connections, animated by the familiarity and recognition they spark in the viewer (Figure 8).



Figure 8

Visual Connections.

A commuter passing the graphic installation on his way through to the platforms of Marylebone Station.

Credit: (graphic map) Climate Cartographics // Photo: Clare Hamman

Site and space

On the western side of Marylebone Station lies a subsidiary entrance. Formerly the parcel handling area, it acts as a nexus connecting two communities – the commuters who arrive by train to work in the surrounding offices, and the residential community who live in the streets neighboring the station. The Harewood Avenue entrance is thus constantly busy with the different rhythms of these groups of actors, and yet it feels a world apart from the main station concourse. Isolated from the bustle of tourist-facing Marylebone to the



Figure 9

Travelers through Space and Time.

Where the history of Marylebone weaves across seven panels, highlighting the political, cultural and economic contexts which have shaped the station's existence, the contemporary graphic is brought to life by the interaction of the passerby. The cartographic layers are exploded through augmented reality, while distance and time blur between the contours of the railways' geographic range.

Credit: (graphic map) Climate Cartographics // (panel design): Chasing Shadows // Photo: Clare Hamman

south and east of the station, it provides a space for people to pause from their daily routine.

The combination of the station's evolving function and daily interaction with users is reflected in the design and spatial arrangement of the installation within this entrance, connecting the content to the station. The historic panels span from the street entrance towards the concourse, meandering through Marylebone Station's chronology as they explore its cultural and social history; while the graphic map is oriented with the abiding feature it depicts, the rail tracks.

The design of the installation was driven by a desire to embody the research, encouraging simultaneous modes through which the station could be read and understood, both intellectually and spatially. The editorial composition and layout of the historic panels presents a qualitative disclosure of histories and archival material related to Marylebone. Their spatial arrangement draws the viewer into the station and an engagement with its interiority. Conversely, the graphic map was conceived to embody multiple contemporary geographic and social representations of the neighborhoods beyond the train station, expanding horizons of possibility in the present while encouraging reflection on the past.

Standing in the middle of the Harewood Avenue entrance, the spatial compression of the railways' geographic connections to Oxford and Birmingham can be transformed through technology. By viewing the map through an augmented reality interface, the



Figure 10

Marylebone Station, Main Entrance.

Described by John Betjeman as "(A) public library from Nottingham which has unexpectedly found itself in London" ([1952] 1982, 84), the diminutive stature of Marylebone Station makes an impression on those who know it; a familiar, welcoming gateway.

Credit: Photo: Clare Hamman

superimposed layers delaminate and appear to hover, floating virtually in the space between the viewer and the interior walls. The rail track separates from the landscape's contours, the individual building façades from neighborhood characteristics (Figure 9a-c).

This play between graphic layers, place, and the viewer emphasizes the role we all hold in creating the story of a place. A map is always a symbolic representation, but this is more than a stylized depiction of specific features, a way to navigate coordinates; it is a map of meanings. Weaving together the threads of social legacy and cultural history, the installation places the traveler at the heart, offering tools to form and capture connections to Marylebone Station through time and geography. It demonstrates how archival exploration can reveal nuances of the past, reframing forgotten voices of a place, and how acknowledging our presence – and the present – illuminates the connections between the building itself and the many communities that it touches (Figure 10).

Notes

1. The Parliamentary Act, "Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway (Extension to London, &c.) Act 1893", was given Royal Assent on March 28 1893. The Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway was renamed Great Central Railway in 1897.
2. Fredrick William Bremer built the first British four-wheeled petrol-engine motor car. Starting work in 1892, the vehicle evolved from a three-wheeled, gas-engine model. Still incomplete, it first ran on a public highway in December 1894.
3. Navvies were a migratory workforce who powered the creation of Britain's railways during the 19th century. They established temporary homes close to the site of work, relocating with each phase of development.
4. The Marylebone Anniversary Map was commended in the Stanfords Award for Printed Mapping category at the British Cartographic Society Awards 2024.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Supplemental data

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Biography

Clare Hamman is an architecturally-trained designer, documentary producer and consultant. Working with universities, broadcasters and small organizations under the umbrella of Chasing Shadows, she is interested in the interactions between society, design and representation. Having developed a specialism in the management, representation and dissemination of archive collections, archive material is central to many of her projects across different media, whether used to understand the context of the collection itself or forming an integral part of the narratives she creates. She has worked on projects including the Archigram Archival Project at the University of Westminster (UK), the centenary exhibition at The Penn Club (London, UK), and the Alsop Collection at the MGF (UK). Email: clare@chasing-shadows.com