

## REVIEW

05.11.15 Ellie Seymour [← back to list](#)[View comments](#)

## Great London Underground posters, celebrating London after dark

As London gears up for the launch of the Night Tube service next year, we visit a new exhibition at the Transport Museum on the history of late-night travel in the capital



Anyone who has taken in a late-night show or worked a nightshift in London will be familiar with the joys of nocturnal transport. It can be random, unruly and revolting at times, but without it, modern-day London would be an entirely different place.

This is the subject of The London Transport Museum's compact exhibition - Nightshift: London After Dark - which looks back at the history of late-night travel in the capital, charting how the spread of electric lighting liberated the city's timetable, led to an exotic nightlife and the rise of the city's first shift workers - across the newspaper industries, postal services and in factories to markets, events and catering.

Featuring old posters, photographs, mosaics, comics, cartoons, video footage, and record sleeves, the viewer is invited on a chronological journey to watch as the lives of Londoners evolve, from the rise of the West End and Second World War tube sheltering to the 1980s clubbing scene, through to hard-hitting safety campaigns, the new possibilities of neon and the anticipated Night Tube service.

The exhibition is worth seeing for the old promotional posters from the museum's archives alone, some dating back as far as the 20s. Harold Sandys Williamson's 1924 'Brighter London' reminds us to take in a show if we travel by underground, while his 'There and Back' from 1928, uses the atmosphere of a Parisian-style bill to capture the spirit of London's new nightlife scene.

Impressionistic maps show just how many theatres and cinemas there are across the capital, while a cheeky poster asks 'Why home so soon?' Then there's a beautiful piece by Philip Thompson from 1958 - 'To Town Tonight' - an expressionistic-style modernist painting, reassuring us: 'You deserve an evening in London's West End - theatre, music hall, cinema, restaurants or the unceasing magic of the dancing lights... all within your reach by London Transport.' Really, making a night of it in London is nothing new.

I'm surprised to find late nights at the zoo isn't a new activity, an advert from 1935 encouraging visitors to take the Tube home late at night after an evening with the flamingos in Regents Park. Another shows showing how voters could use public transport to reach central London to hear the results of the latest general election over the radio.

There are lots of beautiful old black and white photographs dotted around the exhibition that capture various scenes from a decade of night travel. In 1913, we see London's first night bus waiting outside Piccadilly Circus station - the N94 from Liverpool Street to Cricklewood - which ran up until as recently as 1991. Others tell the story of the Tube during 'Blackout', showing people sleeping on platforms, huddled together on escalators playing cards, waiting for the air raid to pass.

Elsewhere, rat catchers tote their kill through a dark tunnel, while we see the underground's army of 'fluffers' hard at work throughout the night to keep the tunnels free from fluff and dust - a job that was carried out right up until the 1990s.

The Post-War era sees brighter advertisements, including Fred Millett's 'London After Dark', a mesmerising Stanley Kubrick-esque design reminding the punter not to forget that London transport can take you to the cinema, opera, galleries, theatre and home again. But it's the section on 'Nightclubbing' that brings us right up to the present day. Exploring transport in the 1980s, this is when London Transport discovers it has a new audience - 'disco goers' - when it launches a new campaign to target these night clubbers, and starts expanding the system into the network we know today.

There's only a little amount of film footage in the whole exhibition, but it's worthwhile, taking us behind the scenes into the London bus network's operational control rooms. We watch as those back stage monitor traffic flow, communicating problems to the drivers, diverting their route if necessary to keep the service running smoothly and on time.

The exhibition finishes with some fascinating contemporary interpretations of the city after dark - there's Tim Bird's comic book-style story, Nightshift, and designs for TfL's new oyster wallets poised for release alongside the Night Tube service. But perhaps most exciting and memorable is artist Marc Hagan-Guiry, aka The Paper Dandy's fantastic kiragami (a version of origami using one piece of A3 paper), The Curious Nightshift. Produced alongside the National Theatre's production of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime, it depicts modern London at night and includes key moments from the famous play, such as the main character, Christopher Boone's perilous journey on the Tube.

It's a powerful end to this satisfying, albeit small show.

**Night Shift - London After Dark is on until 10 April 2016. For more information, visit [www.ltmuseum.co.uk](http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk).**

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