

Mind The Gap

The voice was instantly familiar to anyone who traveled on the Tube.

'Mind the gap, please!' it said, in the kind of gentlemanly tone that somehow made the word 'please' superfluous.

Only a London Underground aficionado, possibly wearing an anorak, might know the name of the man who recorded an announcement heard daily by tens of thousands of people for decades: Oswald Laurence, an actor whose films never reached as wide an audience as those four simple words.



But to one woman, that voice had a deeper and far more poignant significance. His wife used to hear it when she travelled through Embankment station, which serves the Northern Line and three others, anonymous among the 4million a day who also use the Underground.

Long after Mr Laurence died 12 years ago at the age of 80, she reportedly found comfort from hearing his voice on the loudspeakers, and would sit on a platform bench to hear him.

Alas, times changed. Instead of the reassuring sound of her husband, progress eventually inflicted on the commuting public a computer generated recording that felt it necessary to add that the 'gap' was 'between the platform and the train'.

Until now, that is. Because without great fanfare, someone with a heart at Transport For London reintroduced the late Mr Laurence to Embankment in response to a plea from his widow. She wrote to TFL bosses explaining the gap it had left in her life when his voice reached the end of the line - and won them over.

Quicker than a semi-fast Amersham, TFL put a copy of the announcement on a CD and sent it to his widow. Then it ditched the nasty computer voice and gave nice Mr Laurence the stage once again.

Now he can be heard in all his glory on the Northern Line at Embankment, with a possible move to consider expanding his audio empire further still.

Yesterday the internet and Underground buffs were abuzz with excitement at the blast from the past, although many thought wrongly the voice was that of Peter Lodge, a sound engineer who made a similar 1968 recording.

Yesterday the Daily Mail traced Mr Lodge's son Graham, however, who still has his late father's original recording and quickly derailed the romantic notion of his mother, long dead, being the widow in question. For the record, Mr Lodge's 'Mind the gap' did not say 'please'.

Yesterday TFL was bombarded with enquiries about the Embankment development after commuters heard the old voice. Last night after a day of panic and confusion more normally experienced by its rush-hour customers, it finally explained the mystery.

Nigel Holness, London Underground Director, said: 'Transport for London were approached by the widow of Oswald Laurence to see whether she could get a copy of the iconic Mind the Gap announcement her husband made over 40 years ago. We were very touched by her story, so staff tracked down the recording and not only were they able to get a copy of the announcement on CD for her to keep but also worked to restore the announcement at Embankment station.'

The 'gap' in question is the space left by certain trains when they pull up at certain stations. It is created partly because the Underground has so many curves that trains cannot always run parallel to the platform, and because some carriages are narrower than others.

London Underground has used several actors and voiceover artists for public address messages over the years, including Tim Bentinck, who plays David in long-running BBC Radio four serial The Archers.

Mark Mason, author of 'Walk the Lines - the London Underground, Overground', said: 'He was the "Mind the Gap" voice on the Piccadilly Line for a few years. They gradually phased him out too, until the last station he was left at was Russell Square - which happened to be the stop his wife used for work. Whenever she heard him saying "Mind the gap", she said: "Thank you, darling, I will." '

Source:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2290377/The-original-voice-mind-gap-returns-London-Underground-12-years-death--tribute-widow-uses-tube.html>